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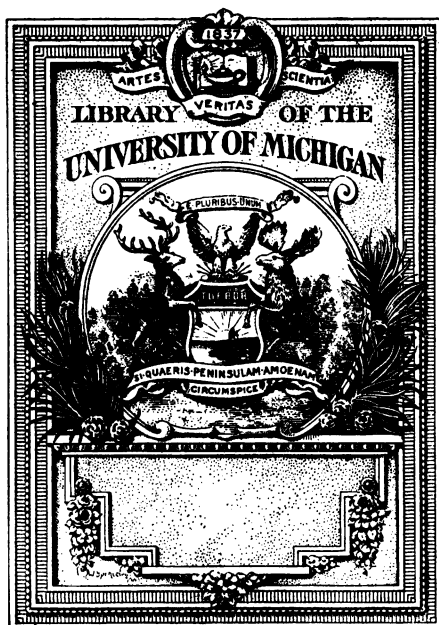


Anne Carmel

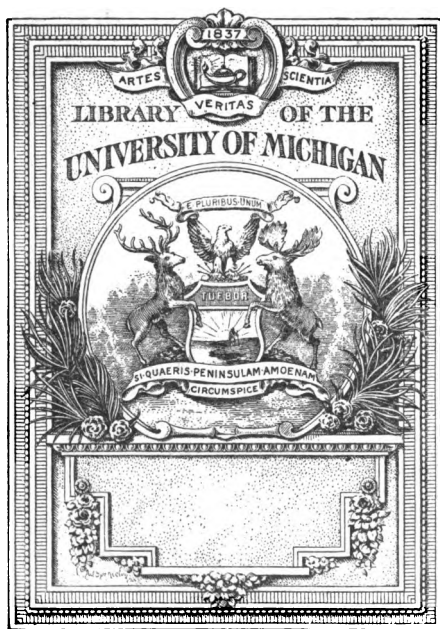
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ANNE CARMEL



1790



1870



"Harnett waited with his head uncovered."

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ANNE CARMEL

BY

GWENDOLEN OVERTON

AUTHOR OF "THE HERITAGE OF UNREST"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY ARTHUR I. KELLER

New York

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ANNE CARMEL

CHAPTER I

FROM the shimmering tin spire of the church of St. Hilaire the Angelus was toning out the close of the day. Over miles upon miles of farms and forest, of hills and valleys, of river and creeks, there was no other bell to answer it. It had the country far and near to itself, and at each stroke of the tongue against the pealing resonance of the bronze the faint, thin yellow of the afterglow seemed to quiver and fade a little away. For the summer hours of ringing the bell were still in effect, though five o'clock was now somewhat before the rising, and seven somewhat after the setting, of the sun.

Until the last vibration had spread off into the distance of the shadowing hills, Jean Carmel and Anne stood waiting. Behind the woods of maple and elm and aspen across the river, the western sky was pulsing yet with hot color. It was reflected over the smooth water and the shining line of beach, and showed the priest and his sister, two fine young types of that race which first made its way through the fastnesses of the Five Nations, across the vast prairies beyond, to

the northerly ranges of the Cordillera in the west, of the race which gave to the history of the New World the greater part of its most picturesque and romantic figures, Champlain, Frontenac, La Salle, Maisonneuve, and those hero-martyrs in a dubious cause, the Jesuit missionaries of the French colonies ; to say nothing of Madame La Tour and Marguerite de Roberval, Jean Mance and Madeleine Verscheres.

The time since those, and such as those, ruled and retarded the destinies of their troubled and bitter northern land is gone by long and prospering years, and the race has changed in body, and spirit too. But there remain among it still, in some numbers, men who are worthy of their forefathers, and women as fit for courts of Europe, or cabins in the wilderness, as were their grandmothers of earlier centuries.

Jean and Anne Carmel were of these: she, none the less that she wore the dress of any mere habitant girl of the remoter farming districts ; or he, that his big, square-shouldered figure was hung with the black cassock of his order, and his head covered by a wide silk-beaver hat.

It was because of the large-brimmed hat that the canoe he carried—a home-made affair of primitive sort—was balanced well out upon his arm. When the Angelus had stopped ringing, he started down to the edge of the beach and walked out with a steady step upon a long board that reached over the water, rest-

ing one end on the beach, the other on a big stone. He stooped, and sliding the canoe from his shoulder, set it afloat. Then he turned, holding to the painter, and snapped his fingers.

A dog had been waiting upon the beach,—an eager-eyed, sharp-eared, small animal, whose wiry bristles and general coloring suggested a not very remote Scotch-terrier ancestry, mixed, however, with many bloods. She had been running back and forth on the soft, wet sand, where the little five-dented tracks oozed full of water and shone in the red and purple light, tense in every muscle, shivering all over with anxiety and anticipation, whining to herself when her feelings were too much to be endured in longer silence. She was out upon the board with a spring, but the instant she came beside the canoe she subsided without the need of any warning word. The priest motioned to her, and she jumped in lightly, exactly in the middle, so that it hardly rocked. Then, flattening herself under the thwarts, she went forward to the bow and took up her place, sitting on her haunches. Anne had come out, too, upon the plank. She carried the paddle, and, giving it to her brother, bent down and tweaked the dog's ear. "She has the discretion of her famous namesake, hein, Pilote?" she said. "But it is my place you have there, remember." The generous behavior of the female in favor showed forth in Pilote. She turned her head a very little and looked

at Anne with entire indifference, and did not stir so much as her bit of a tail the breadth of one of its stiff, coarse hairs. She recalled, perhaps, occasions when Anne had had the front place in the canoe and had remained callous to whimpering pleadings and shortly, sharply barked entreaties to be taken in, even if only to be held ignominiously and as a novice in somebody's arms.

Jean Carmel observed the most human manifestation. Pilote, he suggested, was—as was frequently the case with her betters—under very mistaken impressions regarding the favors she received. And she would perhaps have exerted herself to greater civility had she but realized that she was being gratified by reason precisely of the comparative unimportance of her life. “We are going above the rapids to-night,” he added.

Anne was the descendant of women who had not hampered their men with tender fears, to whom the memory of a man dead in fight or adventure was dearer than the possession of one loving ease and safety for their own sakes. She knew that the rapids were dangerous. But she knew also that neither that nor anything she could say would keep her brother from going above them and shooting them on the return. And so she said nothing.

He stepped into the canoe, pushed away from the plank, brought himself around with a twist of

the ash paddle, and fell to work, kneeling on one knee and putting out to midstream. The river was not a broad one for the greatest part of its length, but at St. Hilaire it spread out to almost a lake, with several small green islands in the midst. One of the village men had driven his horse and wagon down into the rippling shallows, and, standing on the wagon, was filling a barrel with the supply of water which would have to serve his family for the next few days. St. Hilaire was on the river's edge, but water was scarce there, and cost cents or toil for the hauling. In the winter, when the ice was heavy, it was more precious and hoarded still. Two of the dozen children who had made toilsome the villager's score or so years of married life were on the wagon with him. They raised their hats as the Curé went by them, not far away, and then they waited, looking after him.

Anne, on the end of the board out over the water, looked after him, too, until the canoe, with the big black figure half standing in it, had gone well up the pink and purple current, on the glassy surface of which the streak of wake glistened brightly. When he had disappeared behind a point of aspens a half-mile above, she turned and went along the beach, walking where the sand was dry and hard, the little yellow flowers thick under foot, and the alder bushes growing down to the water line. When she came

to one of the roads that led up from the river, she took it and went on toward the main street.

A fine, bright thread of new moon hung in the sky where it was still a little yellow above the branches of the apple trees. The steady song of the crickets was burring dryly through all the evening air. The village people were out in their bits of garden patches and orchards, or sitting with their dogs and cats upon the front porches of their cottages. It made a pretty picture of rest and contentment, now that in the deepening twilight one could not see that the children were ragged and half clothed, and the women lined and made ugly, long before their time, by hard work, stinting, and much motherhood. They gossiped the small matters of the parish as they rested for an hour, sitting in the mild evening, less to enjoy that than to save the burning of candles. All of them spoke to Anne Carmel, and they were pleased when she answered. She could hardly have done less; but she was of those to whom a mere word and smile will attract more devotion than will great acts of service and self-sacrifice rendered by another. The men and the women looked after her and the children went to the fences and hung over, or peered between the palings, following with round eyes the tall figure, quick-gliding and indistinct in the dusk. She had for them all a good deal of the attraction of the unfamiliar, though they saw her every day, and had for eight years.

But she was not one of them. Neither, for that matter, was the Curé; yet he was a friend and counsellor — a thing altogether new in their experience of parish priests at St. Hilaire. And he was brought into close relation with them in that they had the right to call on him, to expect much of him. He might see them in their homes, at their best or worst. But for his mother and sister they had ways and speech of ceremony. It was only a few of the children of well-to-do farmers who had been sent away for education who could consider themselves on a footing of anything like intimacy with the family at the presbytère. But the village did not resent it. It liked Madame Carmel sufficiently well, and it had a quite intense admiration for Mademoiselle Anne. Not that they thought her beautiful. Less imposing women, more pink and white, with smaller features and meeker look, they understood better, and preferred — something on the order of the plaintive Blessed Virgins of the holy pictures and statues.

There was perhaps, in all the neighborhood, only Paul Tetrault whose admiration of her looks was unreserved. He was the son of one of the well-to-do cultivateurs and had had his tastes formed by metropolitan experience, in the college at Montreal. And he was, besides, in love with her.

He came down from the steps of the post-office now, and joined her as she was passing. Then they stood

in front of the presbytère talking, Anne leaning her long-limbed body against the white picket fence, and he on the narrow sidewalk of unevenly laid flat stones. He did not go in with her to the house. But he was happy when he left her, and went on out the road to the farm. He sang to himself an air from "La Belle Hélène," learned in the days of the Montreal college and the wearing of the blue sash. He affected such tunes as he conceived to be modern, and held the habitant chanson in a good deal of contempt.

He had let go his last chance to get Anne's promise to marry him — a chance which had been good just then. But he was no more aware of that than are most of us at the moment of making the errors of omission which leave, forever after in our lives, a space that cannot be filled. And Anne went along the path between the flower-beds of the presbytère garden. She was happy too, and thinking better of young Tetrault than she was ever to think again. She had watched the canoe going up the river out of sight, and there had come to her a realization that the man in it was only, after all, one upon whose life she had no justifiable claim — her brother, to be sure, but in no wise bound by that to let himself be influenced or governed by her wishes and actions, having the unquestionable right to go his own way apart from hers, independent of her, if he should so choose. And she wanted some one who would not have that right. It was because of that she would

have promised, there by the presbytère gate, the thing to which she had refused to bind herself more than once before, to marry Paul Tetrault.

As for the Curé, he kept on up the river, making good time, with his strong, steady paddle strokes. He was kneeling now on both knees. The afterglow faded, the new moon sank, and the evening star came blazing out near the earth. The twilight settled into the deep blue of the northern autumn night, and still he headed the canoe against the current, working hard, while the dog sat, without moving a single well-trained muscle, forward in the bow.

When he had made his portage around the rapids and it was near midnight, he beached his canoe among some weeds, and, tying it to a tree branch, went upon the shore, the dog with him. He groped for a few dry sticks and built a fire, then stretched himself out in the long grass beside it, propping his head with one hand and watching the crackling flames sputter from one stick to another, and lick and flicker, and then burn. The dog lay herself against him, and he tweaked at one of her stiff and nondescript ears thoughtfully. Now and then he got up and found more sticks back among the thick trees and put them on the fire. And after a while he took out a breviary and went to reading it by the red, moving light. It was for his pleasure that he did this thing that a better man than he had done for the saving of savage souls, crouching in the

snow outside of wigwams, straining his smoke-seared eyes in the light of the moon. The mantle of Le Jeune and his followers had become a garment soft and comfortable.

The dog, in pursuance of the traditions attached to her name, sniffed about in the undergrowth from time to time, or sat with her ears cocked and her eyes angry, looking into some wavering black shadow, bristling and growling in an undertone. She felt her responsibilities (and, like many of the human race, tended to make herself disagreeable in fulfilling them), though there flowed in her veins none of the blood, whatever it may have been, of that very important factor in Canadian colonization, the worthy Pilote, whose fame has been accorded bronze and a monument.

But if she were not descended from the settlers of Montreal, her master, at least, was. Yet of his own descent he knew only a little more than did the dog of hers. He had known his father, he knew his mother; the fathers and mothers of those were accountable for. But beyond that it did not go. Those who are full of youth and strength and the sense of present, all-absorbing life concern themselves little enough with such matters as a rule—having unconsciously, perhaps, something the attitude of that master democrat who proclaimed himself, disdainfully, his own ancestor.

But if Jean Carmel could have gone back into the

short and troubled history of his country and could have followed through the confusion of birthrights that resulted from lawlessness, from mixing of races, from the loose manners of a conquering people, part aristocrat, part adventurer and convict, and largely good-for-naught, from the animal unmorality of savage tribes, from vows of celibacy in the church and out of it, — if he could have traced his ancestry back through all that, he might have found less of duly solemnized marriages than would have been satisfactory to him; but his position would not have been worse than that of many another of his people, and he would have come upon some forbears whose places in a romantic history had been fairly won. He was of stock which had produced the military chief of that vision-led band which landed under the sunset shadow of the Mont Real on a day in May, and claimed the island in the name of the Virgin Mother, that undaunted young nobleman from out the most civilized kingdom of Europe, who would obey his orders though every tree on the island were an Iroquois. Men like that, as well as men of the third estate, had made his own existence possible. So too had women such as the fourteen-year-old child who dared to save another woman at the risk of her own life, and who held her feeble Castle Dangerous on the St. Lawrence for seven days against the swarming red enemy. There had, perhaps, been among his ancestors, as well, one or two of those women whose

perplexed, well-intentioned fathers had offered them to the white men without the superfluous and incomprehensible form of the Christian marriage service. The companions and successors of the iron-breasted governor, Lutetian, noble and Indian brave, English soldier and Loyalist, French *coureur de bois*, prosperous and unscrupulous trader, Irish immigrant and quiet cultivator of the St. Lawrence farms—all of them had had their share in the production of Jean Carmel, priest at St. Hilaire.

They were his bodily progenitors. And his spiritual ones were not unlike : the Récollet fathers, who, foremost with the foremost *coureur de bois*, had carried the Cross to the mountain fastnesses of the gigantic West, who had said the first mass in a new and appalling land, who, driven away by the plotting, intriguing, and favoritism of a far-off court, gave place to those Jesuits who founded not only the monastery, but the Huron Mission as well, and who suffered death by many times more cruel than ever the early Christian martyrs were called upon to meet.

Among those first priests of Canada there were not only ones who taught and baptized the faithless Indian, and followed the ways of peace and truth—there were others who put themselves at the head of soldiers and fought in the van, who stopped at no deceit or subterfuge to claim a convert soul, who preached from their pulpits the massacre of the Protestant

settlers, and paid with their own hands the bounty money on many an English scalp. Yet, if one believes with the historian that the militant priest is at least of more worth in a world of action than that one who withdraws himself into hermitage and contemplation, they were a magnificent band of heroes and martyrs, with all their faults. But the laws are easy now and peace is assured ; the land which starved the Five Nations gives plenty to the peoples who braved the Five Nations' tortures ; the children of the daring settlers and men of the woods are habitant peasants and villagers, kept not too intelligent, or drugged with superstition. Or in the cities they are become as other makers of a country's material prosperity—law-abiding, both civilly and religiously. So a mission is no longer to the dangerous Hurons, but for the obedient parishioner. And the enemies of the faith—being in control of the land itself—must be treated by other methods than the Acadian's one of burning their homes and taking their scalps. The chances for a devotion which will satisfy the strenuous soul are not over plentiful. To hear confessions and say masses, to baptize children and a very rare convert, to marry the youth and bury the dead, is the work that lies ready to the hands of the successors of Brébœuf and Jogues, of Piquet and the Abbé Le Loutre. It can be a good work still, but it is often merely one, like another, for the earning of a liveli-

hood not too hardly, and at it a man may grow flaccid and careless very easily.

It had seemed so certainly to Jean Carmel. And when he had entered the priesthood it had been with the fixed intention of becoming flaccid and careless neither morally nor physically nor mentally. He had said so to the bishop who had ordained him. "You remember the little boy who wailed that all the battles were fought, and all the discoveries made, and all the books written, and all the heroic deeds done, and nothing left for a man to accomplish? Well, I am not of the opinion of that boy. There is still all to be done in the world that man can do—and more. And I will try to perform my part of it." "Certainly," had said the bishop, "certainly, my son." He had met with the enthusiasm of novices before. It was Jean Carmel's first blow against that limp spirit of the world, long encountering with the yielding of which must almost of necessity take the sinew from one's arms, more or less. But he had not been discouraged then, and he was not as yet.

He had been eight years in the parish of St. Hilaire—his first,—and though some of his beliefs had gone, he was not of those feeble ones who let their ideals be taken too. If he had fallen short of any of his intentions, if he had become flaccid and careless in any way, it was mentally. But that was, by very force of circumstances and of his life, little short of

inevitable. Morally his strength was still intact — and physically.

There had been power in the arms that had sent the canoe heading straight up the current of the stream, and there was power in the bent neck and shoulders as he leaned forward, closer to the fire, reading. There was the ability to hold or to crush in the hand that had the breviary. And his was the love of uninhabited spots of that prophet who predicted woe to them that join house to house, and field to field, "till there be no place that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth." The great silence and blackness and loneliness and space were good. They are the primal condition of the soul, and the soul must touch them now and again for the gathering of strength, as the giant of the myth had need to touch his mother Earth.

When he judged by the stars that it was not many hours from dawn, the Curé covered the cinders of the wood with wet weeds from the beach, — for the fire of Miramichi has dwelt in the memory of the Canadian woodsman. Then he called to the dog, who was snarling back among the trees at something real or imagined. She came, still showing her teeth and looking behind her. They got into the canoe again and pushed outward from the bank.

The darkness was blacker than when he had landed at midnight, and more thick. Except the dense loom-

ing of the woods on the near shore, and the steel glitter of the light of some star on a ripple, he could see nothing whatever. But he knew the river well, and, leaning back at rest, keeping close enough to the bank to avoid the centre of the current, he had only to steer. It was not until the first whitening of the sky that he came to the rapids, and he shot them in safety. The bow of the canoe swung suddenly from side to side, cut down and sprang out of the water, but Pilote, sitting on her haunches, her fore paws braced, did not move. If she had lost her balance, the Curé's skill with the paddle might have availed very little, and he would, in all probability, have had to make his fight with the waters themselves, breast to breast. That he would have won in the fight was also probable; the river was not swollen in the autumn, and he swam well. But when he was past the danger-point he looked up to the bluff on the shore above him. In the fading night, paling wanly near the horizon, he could see a high, thin black cross rising against the sky and the fine-sown stars. He knew that there were five other crosses at its base. The breaking of a log jam had sent six men to their deaths here, a few springs before.

As he came in sight of the spire of the church of St. Hilaire and heard the Angelus ring again, it was gray dawn. The current was steady and smooth here. He stood up in the canoe and looked

down the river. On the right bank nearest to him, and across from St. Hilaire there was the thin blue haze of smoke against the dark of the trees, and presently he saw the red gleam of a fire. Then a man walked down to the beach and watched the canoe coming toward him in the pale glimmer of daybreak, over the smooth water, a massive black-robed figure standing erect in it. The Curé knelt on one knee and put the canoe over to the right bank. And the man on the shore waited. "A priest—by the shades of the Jesuit fathers!" he said aloud, when he could see that the black garb was a cassock. But there was, after all, nothing so strange in that. He had hunted and fished in Canada too much not to have met with the sportsman type of parish shepherd. And recalling at least one, in the northern salmon regions, whose little irregularities in fish catching and trading had not prevented him from being uncommonly good company in a camp, he hallooed a greeting. The Curé's voice came back over the river, and the canoe headed more sharply inshore. A guide had been back by the tent. He came down now to the sand. He was a half-breed from Oka, of the weedy, thin-bearded sort whose white blood seems to be a poison slowly killing them.

When the priest was within speaking distance, the Englishman on the beach called again. There was fish and bacon and coffee, if the Curé would land. He spoke in French, badly and with effort. The Curé ran

his canoe on some water grass and stepped out. He answered the heavy British French in English quite as perfect as the Englishman's own—if less practised. The offer of breakfast was tempting—but he had mass to celebrate at seven.

"It is five," said the Englishman. "You can finish and be across in good time."

The Curé shook his head. He had put on the wide-brimmed beaver now again, and looked more the priest. "I breakfast afterwards," he said. It was a detail the Englishman had forgotten. "But I will swim with you," said the Curé.

And they swam across the river and back again, while the sun came up and touched the church spire to a point of flame where it showed above the trees, and glistened on the bubbles and froth and ripples, spreading out behind the two bodies cutting through the water. Pilote, doing her best to keep up with them, her rough yellow head nose up, followed far in the wake of her master's long strokes. And after they had dressed again, and the Englishman sat by the fire drinking his black coffee and eating his camp biscuit and fish, he accounted for his presence shortly and without detail. He was hunting—and fishing by the way; he was from England, and his name was Harnett.

The priest returned it in kind. He was the Curé of St. Hilaire,—he motioned across the river—and, if

Harnett were to be long in the neighborhood, he would be welcome at the presbytère. There was a flat-bottomed, leaky skiff drawn up on the beach near where the canoe lay—so the river was evidently not an impassable obstacle.

Harnett kept an unmoved countenance at the quaint precision of the priest's English. He would be glad, he told him, falling into the Latin formality of it, to call at the presbytère.

As he finished his breakfast he watched the canoe, with the half-kneeling black figure astern and the rigid dog at the prow, cutting smoothly over to the opposite shore across the sheet of water glinting in all the colors of mother-of-pearl.

CHAPTER II

It is to be doubted if there has ever been so many as one of the blessings of progress which has been recognized and hailed as such, at first sight, by those whose habits of life it in anyway altered, whose customs it threw out of equilibrium. And the amount of unhappiness, not to say sometimes tragedy, which compulsory education can bring about in a community, is something which would very possibly surprise those makers of laws to whom education has been either a foregone conclusion or else a thing worth striving for at any pains.

In a part of the world where it may yet be cited in an obituary, as among the virtues of the deceased, that she was the typical mother of French Canada, having many children, and knowing neither how to read nor write, the placing of the schools "under control," and the compelling of at least a rudimentary sort of knowledge, is necessarily very disturbing to the bucolic peace of mind.

It had disturbed, to a truly pitiable extent, the peace of mind of Marie Louise Gerard. And it fol-

lowed, therefore, that the Curé was the person of whom to seek comfort. St. Anne, who superintended the education of the Virgin and might consequently be expected to be interested in matters having to do with instruction, had entirely failed, though Madame Gerard had commended herself to her with perfect trust. So for several days Madame Gerard had been waiting her chance to see Monsieur Carmel. And now it had come. The Curé was stopping in front of the house to speak to the next to the youngest child. Madame went to the door. She had been spinning and still held the distaff under her left arm. "Bon jour, m'sieu'," she said timidly. Was m'sieu' too hurried to come in for a moment? Monsieur Carmel was never too hurried to be at the service of his parishioners. The curés before him had never called at the houses unless there were money to be demanded, but Monsieur Carmel was otherwise. He went through the gate now and into the cottage. It was a tiny cottage, built of stone and mortar—one room, a pantry closet, and stairs running up to the loft. The family, eight in all, slept in the loft, but in the room downstairs it, for the rest, lived, cooked, ate, and sat about. And since the year after Marie Louise's wedding there had always been a red-and-yellow wooden crib in the corner near the two-story box stove. The door was so low that the Curé had to bend his head as

he came under it, and the room itself was so small that he took up a very fair part of it. The grandmother, in her close white bonnet, sat knitting the heavy stockings that winter would soon make a necessity, and all the children crowded in. Marie Louise had been married at sixteen. She was now twenty-five, and there were five children living and two dead. The youngest, asleep in the red-and-yellow crib, was a month old. To one taking the poet's view of pastoral life it might have been a pretty subject, the neat little old grandmother with her cap and knitting, the sweet young mother with her distaff, the four little girls as hearty and bewitchingly attractive as are most small habitant maidens, and the month-old baby in its red-and-yellow crib. But the Curé had had too many dealings with the realities of pastoral life to indulge in much sentimentalizing poetry. He was under no illusions whatsoever. He knew what the grandmother's life had been, the life of a peasant woman who had toiled in the field like a beast of burden, in her time, ceasing only when she brought into the world another of the children for whom she had no leisure to care, going back the next day to her work. And he knew that these pretty children had not always all they could eat, and that, though their outer garments were whole enough, such scanty underclothing as they had was patched together by their mother's

careful fingers, from rags of many kinds and various colors.

As for Madame Gerard — he could remember her just after her marriage, and she had been one of the prettiest of soft-eyed, slender young women, altogether adoring the young day workman, her husband, who was as much the inferior of his wife in appearance as the average habitant man. She adored the husband yet, though he was still only a journalier and was likely to remain so, the size of his ever-growing family not justifying him in making any bold and hazardous plays for fortune. But the big liquid eyes had become weary and pathetic, and her skin was dead white and drawn over her forehead until the blue veining showed. The mass of her brown hair seemed too heavy a weight, and her shoulders drooped with work and the burden of childish bodies. She was very pretty still, in her appealing way — but the Curé could see the time, a few years off, when the sunken blue eyes would be the one beauty left her. It is only in centres of civilization that one may conceive the woman of thirty as a heroine of romance. And it is only, inversely, where the possibility of romance exists, that a woman keeps herself fit for it. But all thought of other than toil and the bearing of children, and the ultimate terrors of death with which their religion surrounded them, had gone from the lives of these mothers of large families who reckoned their offspring by the living

and the inevitable dead. The Curé was very sorry for Madame Gerard. He pushed back the hair from his forehead with the flat of his big hand. He did it when he was too near to showing emotion, or when he was ill at ease, sometimes when he was annoyed and thought it better not to say so. Then he bent over and lifted the three-year-old child upon his knee. She was yellow-haired and brown-eyed, so impressively pretty that the desire to catch and hold her was irresistible. But she was not of a mind to be held, and she writhed her dainty little body out of the Curé's arms with much skill and prompt success. Madame Gerard bade them go out-of-doors, all of them. When there was only the grandmother left, and the baby, she came to the subject of her trouble at once. Its basis was this new thing of compulsory education. The oldest girl, being now eight years old, could no longer be kept from school, however much she was needed about the house.

"And she can knit, m'sieu', and spin—tena!" She went over to a cupboard back of the big stove and brought out a gray woollen sock, almost finished, but with the needles still in the toe. "She did that. Judge if she is becoming useful to me. And now, just when she can help me, can do the washing and dress the children and take care of the baby,—almost anything that a woman can do,—then she must be sent to school."

M'sieu' le Curé could see, she went on, that she had need of help herself, with so many children—and she so often ill. “I have no strength any more, no health.” She took from him the sock he had examined dutifully and approvingly, with that combined air of wisdom and embarrassment a man always brings to such things. She put it back, and he saw how tidy the cupboard was.

Madame Gerard returned to her chair. All her movements were patiently listless ones. “Yes, but it is not for that I care so much, m'sieu'. It is that when she can read she will think poorly of her mother. I cannot read, you know, m'sieu'.” The big, soft blue eyes were swimming with tears. The delicate pale lips quivered. It was not amusing at all.

He pushed the hair from his forehead again. He did not think of anything to say which would be likely to do much good. But he made the attempt. It would not be possible for any one to think poorly of her, he said, and surely least of all, the children for whom she had done so much. But she was able to cite too many instances to the contrary in support of her view. The village had plenty of children who held their illiterate parents in contempt. “No, m'sieu', they almost always think less of us.” A tear rolled down over the thin, faintly pink cheeks. “It is natural too. It is true. Once they have learned to read—we are not so good as they.” He reminded her that wisdom was the fear of the Lord, the knowl-

edge of God ; the best understanding that of righteousness and judgment and equity ; that, with the good God, reading and writing were not counted to the credit of a human soul. But Marie Louise had a vague, unformulated philosophy of her own which made her feel that the soul of a highly intelligent being was surely of more value in the spiritual economy than that of an unlettered peasant like herself. She could not express it to the Curé, and had she been able to put it in words even for her own understanding, she might have realized it to be of very heretical tinge. All that she knew definitely was that her daughters, however dutiful, would look down on her once they should learn to read and write, and that they would be justified in doing so. There was only one way to avoid it. She must learn to read herself. She told the Curé so, half despairingly, but it was natural enough that learning to read should not, at first blush, seem any such formidable undertaking to Jean Carmel. Like most, he had gone through the process so young himself that the troubles of it were hardly more remembered than those of the coming of the first teeth. It struck him as a very good idea. And he said so heartily. Certainly, if she felt as she did about it, let her learn to read, he advised, relieved that there was so simple an ending possible to the humble little tragedy.

But Madame Gerard sat considering him patheti-

cally with the soft and tearful eyes. "Yet, m'sieu', I cannot go to school," she said. "And I work from five in the morning until after dark, and sometimes much later. It is easy to tell me to learn, but I thought perhaps you could tell me how to do it." There was never the least hesitation in the parish about bringing to the young priest all manner of problems, spiritual and temporal, to solve, about requesting him to make the impossible feasible. He was always kind with it; and he very often found the solution or the means.

He found them now after he had sat for a moment thinking, sitting, bent forward with one arm thrown over his knees and his brows drawn together. He looked up with a quick smile. He was a man who did not smile often. "I have it, madame. If you could come up to me for one hour each evening — after your work is done." The Curé liked his evenings to himself, to read or to walk, to go out in his canoe, to sit with his mother and Anne, or to play cards with visiting neighbors occasionally. But after all, it would be worth the giving up of one hour to see Madame Gerard's face a little less sadly anxious and deprecating. If he could help to lift one of the very many burdens from her young mind, it was obviously nothing less than his duty.

But it was one matter to offer the thing, and altogether another to have to receive her thanks.

He stood up abruptly as her eyes filled again — with the tears of gratitude this time. His palm pushed back the hair from his forehead. "Very well, then, madame ; it is arranged," he put in hastily. And he would not be a severe taskmaster, he assured her. He was out on the porch by then, and could retreat if he wished, so he stopped and called the next to the youngest child from where she was playing among the tomato plants in a corner of the bit of yard. The child came, dubiously and very slowly, carrying a large ripe tomato. From her two-year-old view the Curé looked awesomely large and black. Could she give him her name? he asked her, bending down.

"Cécile," she told him in a whisper, hanging her flaxen head. "That is a good name," the Curé encouraged, "the name of a saint who made beautiful music, which the angels listened to."

"Oui, m'sieu," said Cécile. Whatever the Curé said to her, she always answered, "oui, m'sieu'." She had been taught that it was *la politesse*.

"Be Monseigneur for M'sieu' Carmel," suggested her mother. The Bishop had been to St. Hilaire in the spring, on his three-yearly confirmation visit, when the cottages along the road had been decorated and he and his suite had made their triumphant entry. Cécile had profited by what she had seen. Her round little pink and white countenance became preternaturally

solemn, she raised her hand with the mites of fingers ready for the episcopal blessing, and with creased red palm turned outward made the sign of the cross.

That it might not perhaps be altogether seemly did not occur to the Curé. The likeness to the Bishop was irresistible, and the Bishop was a pompous little man. Monsieur Carmel chuckled over it as he went on his way, swinging up the street.

CHAPTER III

ANNE had been walking down by the river front in the path through the trees. It was a gray evening, warm and breathless, there was a high mist over the sky, and the water was as colorless as dull silver. A couple of punts were out in the middle of the stream. It was Thursday, and the fish for Friday were to be caught—the one time in the week when the villagers used the supply of that food which was there for the mere taking. Anne sat on a big rock and watched them idly. Once she saw a bit of red in the grass under the bushes. The maples had only just begun to turn in a spray here and there, and none of the leaves were falling yet. She went over to see what it was. And she found it to be a little cluster of belated bunchberries. She broke them off and pinned them on her breast. Then she went back to the stone.

Over on the other shore she could see a camp-fire smouldering among the trees, and two figures moving around it. Before long one of the figures came down to the water's edge, shoved off the boat that was beached there, and stepped into it. He began to row

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Harnett meets Anne for the first time.

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across. In the still evening she could hear the even click, click of the oars as they turned on the iron pivots, — that and the humming of the cicadas in the grass and trees and the occasional sleepy rustle of a bird up in the leaves. But those were undertones, and the click of the oars was quick and insistent. It came so steadily, so regularly, so distinctly, followed by the faint splash of water. It grew nearer and louder ; it filled the low, gray sky. Then the boat grated suddenly on the little stones. She could not see it now. A clump of alders was in the way. But in a moment more Harnett came toward the bushes. Anne stood up, rising to her full height.

Harnett was not more easily thrown out than another of his race and considerable experience, but the apparition of the tall gray woman among the tall trunks of the silver birches, in the misty gray of the evening, made him stop short, looking her straight in the face. Then he lowered his eyes. There was a spot of crimson over her heart. He raised his hunting cap slightly and kept on.

He wondered, as he went toward the village, if the habitant whose wife she doubtless was set a just value by his fine possession. As undoubtedly not. And she was probably the mother of a half-dozen babies or so, whose general effect had been enhanced by the gray dress and the gray twilight, and by the uncommonly fitting surroundings — even to the silver lines

of the birches. In the noonday it was altogether conceivable that closer inspection would prove disenchanting. Even then, nevertheless, with one of the half-naked little fellows that teemed about these village cottages, she would make a very fair conception of sylvan motherhood. It was not, however, with habitant mothers he concerned himself. He had come over to see something more of his acquaintance, the Curé. A young, heroic-built priest, who went canoeing all night up and down black and silent waterways, who could then swim a strong flowing current and back again, and — by far more a test of strength — could sit by after that and watch another man eat breakfast, — at least he promised to be worth knowing. “And the coffee must have smelt unpleasantly good, too,” he said to himself. The self-denial upon a mere religious scruple had impressed him. And there had seemed no sort of cant about it, either. As a rule he had an exceedingly poor opinion of the French-Canadian priest. The sacerdotal poacher of the north-eastern salmon regions, who had turned himself a comfortable fortune and who ruled his parish on the principle of the more ancient feudal baronets of the land, had been, after all, about the nearest to a man he had met amongst them, up to that morning. The others he had found rather often sunk in slothfulness, or with an extent and variety of feminine households of near and remote relationship — or even of no relation-

ship at all—which had occurred to him as unwise for the parsonage of a celibate. Without having thought of it, he had the impression that there would be no women around the presbytère of St. Hilaire.

When he came on the main street of the village he stopped at the hotel, whose painted signboard hung out over the road after the manner of that of an old English inn. There were several women sitting on the porch,—women who proved that the beauty of that other down among the silver birches was, at any rate, not the unbroken rule of St. Hilaire. He asked them the way to the presbytère. Was it M. Carmel he wished to see? they demurred, not quick at taking even a very simple idea. The Curé had not told his name, but Harnett accepted it on the chance. The women pointed out the presbytère to him, and as he went on up the stone walk he knew that they were looking after him and giggling. His hunting clothes, or himself, had usually a way of exciting mirth and quite audible comment among the habitants, as he had found before.

The presbytère stood next to the big stone church. It was a white house, of rough granite and mortar, with a red tin-shingled roof. And it was at the end of a long garden. The garden ran down hill to the street for about fifty yards, and the path to the porch led him between two rows of double dahlia bushes, blood-red even in the colorless evening. There were

other beds of flowers ; the garden was gorgeous with them — blue larkspur, and pinks, sunflowers, cocks-combs, hollyhocks, lady's-slippers, and a few late poppies. But the blood-red dahlias on either side of the path, almost meeting across it, and growing along the white paling fence — those were the glory of the place. And the trees were bending under crimson apples and crab-apples, prunes, and native cherries. The snell bushes were red with their unripe fruit. His Curé was no ascetic, at any rate.

There had been a shorter way from the river to the presbytère — through the bushes and across a meadow. Anne had come by it, and by the back gate. Harnett, going up the path through the garden, saw his gray woman of the silver birches turn the corner of the house and move down toward him. The crimson dahlias brushed back from her, and there was still a crimson spot over her heart. Her long steps were hardly the glide of a ghost, but it was rather like some wraith of the dusk, with the stain of her violent death always showing. He stopped and waited for her to reach him.

"I am Monsieur Carmel's sister," she said to him. He saw the resemblance at once, even in the twilight. Her head was as well poised as the priest's. The Curé, she went on to tell him, had had a letter from Montreal in the morning. It had called him there on the business of the parish. He had taken the after-

noon malle to the railroad. Harnett was paying less attention to what she said than to the voice that said it. It was curiously deep and rich for a woman — the voice. He remembered having once heard a primitive musical instrument made of woods, from which much the same low resonant sound had come when it was struck. It was to hear more of the voice, rather than to meet her mother, that he went up to the house with her. He was not, as a rule, at all keen over making the acquaintance of women, having the constraint in their presence, so long as they were strangers to him, of the average young Englishman. But he had no good reason to give for turning back, and he felt some curiosity as to what the mother of this brother and sister would be like.

He found her to be a woman evidently well past fifty, not so tall as her daughter, but with the marks of having been even more handsome once, and in a more formidable fashion. She had dark eyes, and brows that were very black, though her hair was iron-streaked. And her hands were cracked with work. He disliked to touch a woman's hand when it was rough and hard. He glanced at Mademoiselle Carmel's hands as she turned up the lamp. They were large and looked firm. But they were not cracked or rough, and they were uncommonly well shaped.

He sat in the stiff little sitting room, talking to the two women for almost an hour. They spoke English

as well as the Curé himself. Madame's father had been an Englishman, she told him, and her own husband had been half American, from a French-Canadian settlement in Massachusetts. It accounted to Harnett's mind for the superior type of the grandchildren.

When he went he told them that he was to leave for the mountains at daybreak. In all probability he would not see them again. He looked into Anne Carmel's gray eyes, and could not look away at once.

Two evenings after that he camped again across the river from St. Hilaire.

CHAPTER IV

THOSE are in the infinitely small minority who plan a course of procedure and deliberately follow it out, and the more especially if the course be a not too creditable one. It is a concession to virtue, in a way, perhaps, though there is less of inherent virtue in it, than of saving one's self-esteem by blinking the possibilities of one's own unworthiness. And it was not at all with the formed intention of doing Anne Carmel any wrong that Harnett came back to St. Hilaire.

Sometimes it happens to one to see a certain flower or blade of grass at a distance from where one chances to be in the fields or woods. There is no especial desire to have it. The glance has been quite idle and unthinking. It may be a flower or blade of grass like another, and there are as good or better to be had for the reaching out of the hand. One does not give it a second conscious thought. Yet before long one will rise up and go absently over, and come back again, before realizing that the thing one did not, and does not, particularly want is in one's hands.

It was the way in which Harnett had come back to

St. Hilaire. The end of the day's hunt had brought him near there. He went over the river to the presbytère and took some game. Monsieur Carmel had not returned. He was still in Montreal, and had planned for a hunting trip of his own afterward, with some friends of his college days. He went off in that way once every year when it could be arranged. Anne Carmel told him so as she stood under the arch of the old stone gateway of the cemetery, beside the church. The bell clanged out suddenly. While it kept on they could not make their voices heard. They stood waiting. The tones of bronze were booming through the evening air till the ground seemed to shake and quiver. A ray of the sun, slanting through some elms and across the grass-hidden graves, showed hot red lights in the heavy knot of hair at Mademoiselle Carmel's neck.

Harnett was glad he had come back. And he was glad the Curé was away.

Afterward he stayed on near St. Hilaire because he wished to. It was usually, so far as he knew, his only reason for doing things. His was of those direct natures which take care of the actions and let the motives take care of themselves. Motives were things made much of in a certain modern school of emasculated fiction with which he did not concern himself, and which gave them an undue importance. In the matter of stopping on at St. Hilaire, he had time

at his disposal to do with as he liked, and having seen Anne Carmel twice he wanted to see her again. He was not aware of any underlying instigation. And he did not take consequences into consideration any more than does the greater part of mankind, which, after all, acts habitually with about as much view to consequences in the least remote as do the beasts that perish; as little heeding as those, apparently that a deed must needs be Janus-faced, — according as one looks at it from the future or from the past, a consequence or a cause, — and that it cannot die childless.

If Harnett was glad the Curé was away, it was only because, otherwise, he would have had to see more of the brother than of the sister. As it was he met Anne several times by the river front. It was a chance each time, but a chance which both had made possible. Anne had never before gone so often down to the narrow white beach, and Harnett walked on the St. Hilaire side of the river, or spent a great part of his time fishing and rowing about in the leaky, flat-bottomed boat. Anne would hear the clicking of the oars on the iron pivots, and the boat would come around some little point or clump of bushes. So they met several times when no one, except perhaps some villager, knew it; and though Harnett went once to the presbytère again, it happened that Madame Carmel was not there. He sat with Anne upon the porch behind the sheltering madeira vines. And

when he was leaving to go back to his camp, Anne walked down the long path with him, between the brushing dahlia bushes. They stood by the gate for a time, under the low maples. It was a heavy night, thick with clouds. The darkness was dense and dull and warm. He could not see Anne. But she was close to him, very close. They spoke in low voices, indistinctly, to beat off a silence which was settling down as stifling and fraught as the night. Anne's voice was more deep and more vibrant. The uneasy effort grew less, and there was a pause. Harnett was afraid of it. It was numbing him. He could have gone even then. But he did not. Instead he made the last struggle against the silence. He spoke again. But his lips were unsteady, and Anne did not hear him—or she could not answer. The silence which had been closing closed then. She was near in the heavy darkness. And there was darkness and silence over his brain too. He put out his hands, and they touched Anne's head. He took it between them and bent down his face against her warm, thick hair.

When he moved and left her he went back through the still, black village and rowed across the river. The click of his oars on the pivots and the following splash of the oars sounded loud and insistent and even, through all the cloud-dense night. It kept on dully in his ears after he had landed and gone into his tent.

He heard it until he fell asleep on his spruce bough bed, face downward on his folded arms, feeling yet the warm, thick hair, the pulse of her throat under his palms, and the quiver of the cold lips against his own.

He awoke to daylight and a hard rain, and when he had had his breakfast with the half-breed guide he lay back on the pile of boughs and blankets again and tried to read—a Juvenal of the Curé's that Anne had lent him. But even the sharp-cut Latin of the sentences would not get into his mind. He put down the book, clasped his hands under his neck, and lay looking out at the gray, streaking rain. Certain things were very plain to him; the rest he refused to see. What was plain was this—that he was in love with Anne Carmel a good deal more than he had ever been with any woman in his eight and twenty fairly well experienced years, and that he probably would not be able to marry her.

It was the first time that he had ever felt any disadvantage in being dependent for his means and livelihood upon another. So far as that went, it had never concerned him, especially up to then. In the manner of heirs to the estates of aristocratic lands, he had taken it as a matter of course that he should be supported without effort of his own by the senior of the family. The senior was, in this case, an uncle, his mother's brother, and he himself was an orphan—had been since before he could remember. And he had

never been an idler, as he saw the thing. He had done himself credit at school and college, and his time since then had gone, for the most part, to study and to employments that were useful to others, if not remunerative to his own purse. He was a man of mountains and plains and forests, rather than of clubs and drawing-rooms and the turf. As a consequence, his self-respect was still intact. And this though he had nothing whatever and was, so far, of no particular consequence. Whereas his uncle had much and was powerful. Upon that uncle depended his present living and any future success. To obtain those he had only not to prove troublesome.

He would be proving very troublesome in wanting to marry Anne Carmel. The uncle was a man having no notion whatever of that best sort of generosity which permits another to live his own life, even though the manner of doing so may happen to conflict with preconceptions and theories. If his nephew were to run counter to him, he would drop him, once and for all. And his right to do so was unquestionable.

Harnett knew it. And he knew now that it was humiliating. He had been trained to no profession or work. His life was altogether an agreeable one at present. It would cease to be so in nearly every respect, however, if he were to insist upon marrying Anne Carmel. That his uncle would object to her, he

was certain without the trouble of asking. Apart from the fact that it was long planned to dispose of him otherwise matrimonially, there was a yet more serious obstacle. His uncle despised no one thing more intensely than a French Canadian. The prejudice was the result of personal experience. By reason of interests and of past long residence in the country, Harnett's uncle was as much a Canadian as an Englishman. And he shared the English Canadian's common dislike of and contempt for the French inhabitants. But in his case it went even further than the usual political and racial prejudice against a people held as priest-infected, unprogressive, unassimilative, and of a speech and genius forever foreign to those of the Anglo-Saxon. It was a detestation of Gallic blood and characteristics in all their manifestations, worthy the days of the Napoleonic wars. He had come of a line untainted by Norman grafting, and had quarrelled violently with his only sister for that she had married a man whose name of Harnett was proof of cross-channel origin.

A French Canadian, the penniless daughter of a Montreal office-holder, having for brother an obscure village priest,—it was the most completely unfavorable combination that could possibly have been hit upon. Anne herself would not weigh a grain against it all in the falsed scales of his uncle's judgment. Nevertheless, he would ask permission to marry her. It would

not be granted. In that entirely certain event, in what position was he to make any declaration of independence? He wished angrily and for the first time that he had means of his own, or at least a profession. And for the first time, too, there dawned on him the wrong that was done a man bred to the customs and conditions that he himself had been bred to. He was not left the power over his own manhood.

It was still raining hard, with no prospect of stopping. But he wanted to see Anne Carmel again, and now. Madame Carmel was to be at the Tetrault farm all the morning, and Anne would be alone. He did not care to see a great deal of madame. She might bethink herself to oblige him to be more explicit than he could very well be just then. It was one thing to be satisfied himself with the integrity of his intentions. It might conceivably be another to satisfy a village woman who could have no notion of the exigencies of station. If she were not satisfied, it might result in his seeing nothing more of Anne, and to see her often was the one wish he was fully conscious of at present.

In pursuance of it he got up from the blankets and put on his oilskin coat, and rowed himself across the river. As he went along the little side street between the white cottages and the red-weighted, dripping apple trees, the women at the windows beckoned their husbands and children to come and see the tall young Englishman in the wet yellow coat, who trudged dog-

gedly by in the rain, his shoulders thrust forward. He was Mademoiselle Carmel's lover. They had already settled that. The villagers and children who had seen the meetings by the river shore had not been silent.

Anne was by a window also. She looked up from the patch quilt she was sewing as she heard the crunch of purposeful feet on the gravel of the walk, and she saw the figure in the glistening yellow oilskin coat coming up between the long rows of crimson dahlias. She laid down the piece of quiltwork, and went to open the door for him.

If Madame Carmel was away, however, Amélie Latouche, the Curé's servant, was in the house. She had heard the village gossip, and she made it a point during the hour that Harnett stayed to pass the door or the window, or to go in and out of the room constantly. Harnett fancied being spied upon still less than he would have fancied open questioning. It irritated him. He did not intend to submit to anything of the sort, and he told Anne so. If they were to see each other, it would have to be where that could not go on.

Anne sat looking at him for a moment. She was seeing deep behind his blue, determined English eyes. She was seeing the thing exactly as it was, that his love for her could be subservient to his stubbornness or his anger. It was less to him to have done with

her than to be subjected to annoyance or humiliation. But she was not the first woman to knowingly give a good love for a poorer one and be happy over the barter. There was no one about at the instant. She stood up slowly and went over to him and knelt down beside his chair. She laid her head against his arm, putting her hands in his.

And for three times after that she met him openly, by daylight, on the river bank, as she had done before. Then Amélie Latouche told Madame Carmel of it. And that day Anne was not at the meeting-place. But late at night she went down through the meadow and heavy bushes, unchained her boat from its rocks and rowed across the river. She had always had a terror of the dark, and she was miserably frightened; and the click of the oars seemed to spread out through the night under the sounding vault of the star-flecked sky. Harnett, lying awake in his tent, heard it, faint and far off across the broad river at first, but coming nearer. He went out and saw a boat under the black shadow of the shore. The half-breed had heard too, and came up beside him. "Go back," ordered Harnett shortly, and went down to the bank alone. He expected to see Jean Carmel. When he found that it was Anne he thought of the guide again. "Be quiet," he said, "don't speak." He stepped into the boat himself. "Now," he told her, "put off, and keep in the shadow." Upon her account he did not choose

to have his guide telling in St. Hilaire that she had come to the camp at midnight. But he was glad that she had come; and now that she had been the first to make the move, he was more than willing to meet her in some such way again.

Yet he was not the one who suggested it. It was she herself. "I cannot come in the daylight, because I am watched then," she finished, "but I can come at night, until the time when that also is discouraged." She was like her brother in the choice of her English words, and in her low-pitched voice it gave weight to her meaning.

Did he remember the quarry in Napoleon Coppée's pasture? she asked. Harnett had found it one day in his walks. "I will go there," she said.

He had her put him ashore well above his camp, and he stood waiting and listening until she had reached the opposite shore and the click of the oars had stopped. Then he went back along the beach to his camp.

The half-breed reached it some minutes before him.

But the opposition from a source from which he had no disinheritance to fear had its effect upon Harnett. It made him very nearly decide to have Anne at any cost, even at that of his income and his future and his station in life. And those, after all, were really more to him than the mere life itself. A man of the upper classes, thrown suddenly down from them, and de-

prived, when half his days are already gone, of his accustomed means of support, is as much to be pitied as the workingman who loses the use of the right arm that has gained him his bread. He shrinks from the misfortune—but he can hardly be set down as a coward for that.

Harnett considered the advisability of going directly to Madame Carmel and claiming the right to see Anne openly, as the woman he meant to marry. But it was not advisable. In the event of a break with his uncle, he would not be able to support himself in comfort for several years ahead, at the least, and much less so a wife. And even if madame were to consent to her daughter being bound by any such uncertainty, she might put him to the test of serving for Anne without seeing her. And see Anne to the last possible minute he would. That determination was stronger than his previous honorable habits, stronger than his usual good sense—much stronger than his consideration for Anne herself. But he was in a hard position, and he himself was not to blame for it, nor to be punished for it by depriving himself.

That he ought not to see her at any such hour as midnight, or any such place as the limestone quarry, he knew, however, as well as another man must have known it. A better impulse than his selfishness got the mastery for a while. He decided to put a stop to the meeting, if he could get word to her.

He was walking, then, on the St. Hilaire side of the river. He turned about on the road and started back toward the village. It was only noon, however, and he had plenty of time to act. So he went slowly, looking at nothing in particular. He saw the little yellow butterflies flutter and settle on the dusty goldenrod and white daisies and purple vetch, and the grasshoppers snap up from the road into the choked grass by the wayside. He stopped once to try the wild grapes on a vine that hung from a beech tree. They were green yet and acrid. And once he amused himself for a full ten minutes cutting off the path of a soil-powdered caterpillar by putting across its way a switch he was carrying. Yet he was thinking of anything but the trivial plant and insect life about him. Life and all its problems were centred in himself—that egoism which is, after all, Heaven-appointed to the perpetuation of the race and the saving of the soul. It is a matter for the jest and smile of the shallow-sighted, the struggle in a human heart between the love of some one creature and the chance of worldly preferment. But it is the struggle between the force of civilization and the force of nature, concentrated for the time being within himself.

At the moment the more primitive instinct was mastering Harnett. Then two pink pigs came trotting out from a gateway and stopped directly in front of him, grunting a challenge, their clean little snouts

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pointed up at him, twitching inquiringly. He stood still, looking down at them. They were quaint beasts, with their appearance of having been, like the cottages of most of the natives, always newly scrubbed, and the expression in their twinkling pink eyes was amusingly impertinent.

Under ordinary conditions, an ordinary pig was hardly a creature to play with. But he stooped down and held out an empty palm, deceptively hollowed. They were knowing pigs, however, and they showed the futility of the attempt in the very kink of their tails, then, with another series of grunts, moved off side by side. Their rosy hind quarters were derisive. Harnett looked up and saw that a woman was watching him, leaning over the fence, her apron full of ears of sweet corn.

"M'sieu' likes pigs?" she said.

"It depends upon the pigs," Harnett told her, still in the good humor these had induced.

"We have more," said the woman; "would m'sieu' care to see them?"

M'sieu' was not possessed by any special desire to look over the porcine stock of the farm, but it was a habit of his travelling to take in what came in his way and offered. The habitant woman was not lovely, nor had she the appearance of outward cleanliness of her own pigs, but she promised to be talkative, and might be entertaining. Life had been at high tension for

Harnett in the past week; he was glad to ease it for a little while.

The rest of the pigs were in a field of stubble, and were much like the two others except that several of them wore a portable stock of wood which evidently weighed on their spirits as much as on their poor rubbed little necks, and interfered considerably with rooting. "To keep them from going under the wire fences and scratching themselves," explained the woman. She was the wife of Farmer Tetrault, and the Tetraults were proud of their modern farm appliances. The barbed wire fences were, in their opinion, a vast improvement upon the snake or stone ones of the other terres. Madame Tetrault was not only talkative, as it proved—she was garrulous and a gossip. She invited Harnett into the house and showed it to him with pride. Her furniture was all from Montreal. Its cheap hideousness was, to his mind, its only distinction. But the woman amused him even more than the pigs had done. He set her down as a simple and communicative soul, of a vulgarity so entire and so frank as almost to cease to be such. But however communicative and frankly vulgar Madame Tetrault might be, she was not simple. She had heard of Harnett. She had heard of his meetings with Anne Carmel, as had every inhabitant of the parish after the last Sunday's mass. She too believed that he was Mademoiselle Carmel's lover, but she put

a less pleasant interpretation on it than did the rest of the people. And she wanted to get a damaging confession straight from Harnett's own lips, to use it as an argument with her son and turn his attentions from the Curé's penniless sister to the daughter of rich Farmer Lavissee. Madame Tetrault loved money.

"You know Anne Carmel?" began madame, in her barbarous French. Harnett admitted it coolly, with a disconcerting indifference. Madame felt it, but was not to be stopped so easily. "You like her?" His reply that he did was equally unimpassioned. "You have met her down by the river," she said, nodding her head knowingly, her black eyes taking on something the expression of the pale ones of the pigs. "Ah!" she shook her finger at him, "I know. But you are not the first. She has had many lovers — Mademoiselle Carmel — it is a pity — and the Curé is so good. If he knew —"

Harnett's own French was not facile, but he was aware of the full difference in the shade of the word "amant" and its English equivalent in literal translation. And if he had not, Madame Tetrault's tone and looks would have admitted of no doubt as to her meaning. He had, for an instant, the primitive male instinct to kill the faithless female. Then the customs of generations curdled it to an accommodating cynicism. He did not encourage Madame Tetrault, but neither did he keep her from getting in a few cor-

roborative details to enforce her insinuation, before he left. Madame invented the details out of hand, carried away with the satisfaction of it. She detested Anne Carmel, but it was the first time she had dared to lie so comprehensively and broadly about her, since the sentiment of the parish was contrary.

A disease finds best lodgement in a body already enfeebled, and an evil report in a mind not quite strong in its own integrity. And when Harnett went out of the gate and on to the road again, he had already determined that he would not trouble to send any word to Anne Carmel. She might meet him at the limestone quarry at midnight — as she herself, with the facility born of practice, no doubt, had suggested. Anne paid now the inevitable debt for her step outside the safeguards of convention. He saw her easy surrender to his wishes, and above all her visit to his camp, in a new light. What a fool she must have thought him, to be sure, for his pains to hide her presence from the guide that night, to keep her from landing on the shore. And it was for this Lais of a backwoods settlement that he had worked himself to the verge of heroics. He had been hit hard, and it hurt. So he raised his shoulders and laughed unpleasantly. As instruments of intervention Fate had made use of two small pink pigs. Two pink pigs with twitching snouts and crinkled tails had stood, not only in the road before him, but in the path he had been taking toward the probable wrecking of his life.

CHAPTER V

THE half-breed guide had not spent a number of absolutely idle days around St. Hilaire for nothing. He had made the acquaintance of the villagers, and, in exchange for their hospitality at the tavern, had kept them accurately informed as to Harnett's doings and his own interpretations thereof. The morning that Harnett listened to Madame Tetrault, the blacksmith and church furnisher, the director of funeral pomps and the tailor, all weighty and important citizens, listened to the account of how Anne Carmel had gone to the camp across the river the night before. A few hours later the notary was told of it, and he, in turn repeated it to Paul Tetrault, who was in to see him on business. Paul listened and questioned. But it was not in the spirit in which Harnett had listened to Madame Tetrault and refrained from questioning. A love built upon the sands of mere desire may fall at once before a stream of accusation, but that which has its foundation on the rock of trust stands a better chance. Young Tetrault, to be sure, lacked the experience of life,

and of himself, which made scepticism easy to Harnett. The college of Montreal and the parish of St. Hilaire had been about the whole field of his observations. But the rule of the drop of water and the entire sea is that of humanity; and the village in the backwoods is, in little, pretty much as are the wide world and its citizens on a larger scale. That Harnett condemned Anne on the report of one scandal-mongering old woman, and that Tetrault refused to upon excellent evidence were mere matters of personality. Harnett decided forthwith to let Anne hurt herself. Tetrault decided as promptly to prevent it if he could. But it was as fruitless and thankless as he might have foreseen.

Anne listened to what he had to say. She did not have recourse to the cheap device of outraged virtue. In any case, an heroic attitude before such a figure as he made would have been too incongruous. And he was not impressive when he fell back, in his earnestness, on the most colloquial French of his people. Having a standard of comparison close before her, she could not help finding absurd his curly light hair, his pink and white skin, and his general air and dress of a village tailor's beau. He wore several rings with jewels in them on his short-fingered hands. Harnett's hands were long and brown and bare. Anne was thinking of that while Tetrault urged on her, desperately, that her reputation in the

parish was already as good as gone. She had picked off one of the dahlias and had been standing, pulling out the close crimson petals. She threw it away suddenly with a fillip which snapped the stem. It was a sign of how she threw away any caution. "I can't help it, Paul; it will have to go," she said.

Tetrault hesitated, then he brought himself to the point. The pink of his cheeks spread into the roots of his tight curly hair. "Are you going to marry him, Anne?" he asked.

Anne hesitated too. Then her eyes met his at a level, and she drew a long breath. Her own face was dead white. "No," she told him.

He went away and left her after that. But it was not because he had done with her, had washed his hands of the matter. The means of persuasion had failed, to be sure, but there were other ways. That they would make him forever detestable to Anne was no part of the consideration. He was not thinking about his own interests. He had cared for Anne from the time she had been a tall child of seventeen with her hair in two great heavy braids over her shoulders, and he a schoolboy coming back for the summer work in the fields. He was not going to desert her now when she needed him. As for speaking to Madame Carmel, the chances that it would only precipitate trouble were excellent. Her brother could influence Anne, but not her mother; he had seen that often enough. When

Monsieur Carmel should come back he himself would probably step aside. But until then he meant to prevent any more night meetings.

To that end he came in from the farm at dark and took up his station in the shadow of one of the Curé's snell bushes, outside the fence. Anne's room was by itself, built on to the side of the presbytère. He could watch its windows and the front door and the back gate. She could not go out, or Harnett could not come in, without his seeing it.

It was a clear night, with only light clouds blown fast across the sky. The wind was dry and strong. It rustled the trees and whipped them up and down. At the horizon was a hot yellow haze. Tetrault kept close into the bush. Once he picked off some of the red fruits and bit into them. He threw them away again. They were unripe and rough. It was lonely work, and the night was an uneasy, foreboding one. He was uncomfortable. And he was not acting with the support of any set purpose. He did not know what he meant to do, not even just why he was there. His intentions were of the best, but the good intentions of a weak character are apt to be ineffectual. A misdoubting but that his might prove so was making him undecided. And he grew tired waiting. It seemed hours before the light in the presbytère sitting room went out. Then one was carried into Anne's room. He could see her moving about. She

stopped in front of her mirror and took down her hair. It fell brown and heavy. She stood braiding it into two long braids such as she had worn years before. Tetrault thought of her as she had been then, and drew the back of his thick hand across his eyes. Then she came to the windows, and, leaning out, drew the cumbersome shutters to. The house was quite dark. Tetrault settled himself to a longer waiting. The village was quiet. The last men went home from the tavern, singing as they went, one of the inane, pointless, reiterative habitant songs. There was not a footstep after that.

But at the end of more than an hour it seemed to him that there was in the air, under the rustle of the dry wind in the leaves, an even, regular, clicking sound. He listened. It came from the direction of the river. It was not a night sound. It was something else — the click of oars on their iron pivots. One of the impulses for which he trusted to guidance made him run along the fence, across the meadow, and down to the water. He did not stop to listen again for the sound. But when he reached the beach it was in time to see a boat put into a little cove among some weeds. He heard the grate of the bottom on small stones. He went in the direction, slowly, keeping among the alders, and when Harnett came out, upon a clear stretch of shore, they were within a hundred feet of each other. But Harnett did not know it. And, to Tetrault's sur-

prise he did not start off in the direction of the presbytère, but at right angles to it. Tetrault came out from his hiding-place and followed. He had put on an old pair of bottes indiennes of his father's, and walked as noiselessly as ever had any of his voyageur antecedents. The figure ahead passed up a side street and straight out of the village. Tetrault was puzzled almost to the point of dropping off. But he kept on, more from curiosity now than any better motive. A number of times Harnett looked back. But Tetrault was not showing himself. They passed Coppée's cottage. Just beyond it was the tobacco shed, and a gate leading into a narrow lane. Harnett opened the gate noiselessly, left it open, and went up the lane. On both sides there were a stone fence and a line of willow trees. Tetrault got in among the willows. Farther on there was a broken-barred gate in the fence. It led into Coppée's pasture. The figure ahead turned in there, and crossed the pasture toward the quarry. He came to the edge of it and looked down, then back over his shoulder. Tetrault was crouching behind the fence. Harnett spoke in a deadened voice. "Anne," he said, "Anne." Tetrault knew well enough what it all meant now. There was no answer. The Englishman was looking down into the quarry again. His back was toward Tetrault. The habitant crouched, watching, his eyes on a level with the top stones of the fence. There were trees thick about the quarry,

stunted crab-apples and snells and sumach bushes. They rustled and the branches of the apple trees tossed. There were crickets humming dryly. It was an uneasy night. And Anne, who was so afraid of the dark and loneliness, who always had been, even as a young girl—he was letting her come here, the Englishman, letting her come by herself through the black street and the lane where the willow trees made moving shadows.

And down in the quarry it was darker still—it was deep—there were jagged rocks and boulders and a pool of stagnant water. Tetrault's hand was on the top of the fence. It was lying on a loose stone. The stone was not big. His fingers shut over it. It was sharp-pointed. His head came above the level of the fence. He was straightening himself cautiously. His eyes were on the figure by the edge of the black, deep quarry—in which the rocks were ragged and the pools of water slimy. His arm went out and back—then forward with a jerk. The figure staggered, pitched forward, and was gone. The branches of some bushes cracked and some loose stones clattered.

Tetrault looked behind him down the lane. There was no one in sight. He crouched down against the wall again and waited. He was shaking all over. Perhaps he had killed the Englishman. Perhaps he was a murderer. He was in a hideous fear. The body might be lying down there, the still body of a

man among the weeds and sumach bushes and pools of stagnant rain water. He could almost have gone to see — with that abject terror which is courage again. But some one might come and find him there. They would know he was the murderer, and he would be — hung. He gave a low squeal of animal fright between his tight-clinched teeth, and grovelled closer into the wall and the shadow.

And now some one *was* coming. It was Anne, hurrying up the lane and looking behind her. He knew that she was afraid too. She went through the broken-barred gate, and he raised his head and watched her. Would she go away again, when she found her lover was not there? Or would she wait? Or would she go down into the quarry, climb down through the whispering sumach bushes into the big black hollow? It was an evil place in broad day. Nobody came across the pasture to it once in months at a time.

She was standing where the Englishman had stood when the stone from an unseen hand had struck him — on the very spot. She spoke. He could hear the voice, but not what she said. Then he could see her start and bend forward over the edge of the quarry, listening. She was speaking again. He caught a word or two, in French. "Wait," she said, "I am coming." And she was gone into the thick of the bushes. He heard her pushing her way through, heard her feet slip, and the loose stones fall. She was

making her way, scrambling down the steep side, where the rock had been quarried out unevenly in small blocks. Tetrault came from under the shadow of the fence and crossed the pasture, bending low as he ran. He dropped quietly down and drew himself to the edge and looked over. He could not see. But sounds came up out of the big black hole, Anne's voice quivering with misery, and a moaned word or two in the voice of a man. Then the Englishman was not dead — yet.

Anne was speaking — gone back to her own tongue in the crisis. Could he wait? It would not take long. But this time Tetrault's straining ears could catch no answer. "Dear," she repeated, "can you wait?" The wretchedness of the tones, the terrible fear shivering behind them — Tetrault covered his face with his hand. He had better have let her go about ruining her life in her own way. He could hear her groping up to the level again, hurriedly, giving a desperate low cry when she slipped back. He drew away under the stunted apple tree, against the trunk. Then she pushed out from among the bushes and passed him, not two yards away. He saw that her shawl was gone.

He followed her as he had followed Harnett, at a distance, but much faster. She was running. She sped down between the willows so quickly that once or twice he lost sight of her. When she came to

Coppée's cottage she beat on a shutter with both her fists. The shutter was banged open, and she spoke to Coppée and his wife, urging something with entreaties. They demurred, stupid and half asleep and dazed. The shutter closed again, and Anne moved off, walking up and down, beating her palms together. "Make haste," she called, "oh ! make haste, Monsieur Coppée." The door of the cottage was unbarred, and Coppée and his wife came hurrying out.

Tetrault, hiding among the willows, saw them follow Anne up the lane, and after a long time he saw them coming back. They passed him close. They were carrying a body between them. And Anne walked in front, slowly, holding up Coppée's lantern, lighting the dark lane.

CHAPTER VI

YOU may not guess anything of the nature of a man from his rejoicing in the sunlight. The birds of the air, the four-footed beasts, and the lout do as much. But when he looks into the black of the coming storm and rejoices, you may know more. There is a deep, then, answering to a deep, a force that calls to another force.

Jean Carmel, walking back the five and twenty miles from the railroad, reached the top of a high hill, half a league from St. Hilaire, and stopped there. He could see far away in the cleared atmosphere that comes sometimes before an autumn tempest. The forest was all around him, and a great stillness and loneliness. But there was a space through the trees just in front of him. It was where a big fir had been struck down, not long before, by wind or lightning, and, falling, had crashed others under it. The wood was white and fresh and resinous yet where the trunk and the branches had splintered.

Through the gap the Curé looked away to other hills, showing — where the sun's rays cut through and passed — every rock and stump and bush, distinct in an

ash-green glare. And behind them was a sky of dark portent, with drifting clouds of metallic whiteness moving slowly across it in the breath of the nearing storm. Every pine and fir on the ridges stood out plainly. The soil looked brick-pink.

He took off his beaver and tossed it back of him, on the softness of the vines and pine drift and dead leaves. He shook his head freely and stood with it well up. His nostrils widened. A line out of the varied reading of his boyhood came to him, and he said it aloud:—

Et lui, l'insensé invoquait la tempête,
Comme si dans l'orage pouvait régner la paix.

The words went well with the threatening moan of the wind behind the blue-gray, solid clouds. It was a good sound that, recalling that there was even yet a Jehovah of Destruction, a Lord God of the Thunders with the gales in the hollow of His hand, as well as the All Merciful who comforts the sad-hearted, and He who, being omniscient, forgives.

There was a long moment of the silence of the depths of space. Not one thing moved except the cold white clouds drifting against the wide-stretching dark ones. The stillness was intense. Then there was a deep breathing of wind as it passed through the high tops of the trees and bent them over and tossed them back. The living leaves on the ground vines stirred. The

tempest he had invoked was coming from above, and one of which he had no expectation from below. He had written that he would be back at St. Hilaire that day, and would walk. And Anne had come out to meet him. She was climbing the hill, as he stood on the crest of it, making her way through a woodman's path, where the gloom was deep and the branches had to be pushed aside, avoiding the road, which had its occasional passenger.

He heard a cracking of the underbrush which was not from the wind, and he turned about. His face lighted, and he went toward her with both hands out. "Eh bien, La P'tite Chose," he said. It was the name he had had for her from her babyhood when he, as the twelve-year-old brother, had felt himself her bounden protector — a rôle which had given him enough to do, for, from her toddling days, she had had always the faculty of walking determinedly, and with open eyes, into trouble.

But Anne's face did not light, and she drew her hands away at once. He saw that there was a curious look in her eyes, which was meant to be unabashed and steady, but was not convincing and only rather bold — the sort of look he had seen sometimes in the eyes of another kind of woman. And her face was haggard. He saw it, but he did not intend to question her. The basis of their friendship was a large amount of reserve and non-interference. The forcing of con-

fidences was something neither of them ever attempted. And he did not attempt it now, though he knew there was trouble. But, in her black dress, with her old hat of crushed and weather-stained yellow roses, she was in place in the shadows of the forest depth and of the coming storm. He realized it as one realizes external things in the dead pause of a suspense. Then he looked off to the tops of the far ridges, dark beneath the low clouds. The trees were threshing in a pouring wind.

"We must go home," he said; "we will be caught in the rain, as it is," and he started for his hat where it lay on the ground. Anne stopped him. Her voice was lower than ever, more deep, more vibrant with the tenseness of a strain. But he heard it with a sudden distinctness under the roar of the wind.

"No," she said, "I have something to tell you—before you hear it," she motioned her head toward the village and her full upper lip shortened with contempt, "down there." She had never been contemptuous of the village before. He did not like the sign.

There is no calling which impresses its characteristics upon a man—even one to whose nature they are in themselves foreign—so deeply, so ineradicably, as that of the church. That of arms presses it close, perhaps, but there can be soldiers of long service who remain essentially unmilitary. There can never be a priest whose outward seeming does not subtly bespeak the cleric,—the movements, the voice, and the manner.

And it is not only those; the very instincts and thoughts are altered by the tremendous moral pressure of his creed, till a weak man becomes mildly feeble, but a strong man becomes self-contained, and has learned that violence can never be other than dissipated force. And it was because Jean Carmel was a strong man that he heard Anne through quietly, without an interruption.

She had seated herself on the fallen fir, and he stood in front of her, his rusty cassock whipping about his powerful, lean figure. His face had grayed, and his eyes were steady and cold; but that was all. She told the story baldly, almost without detail, and with no attempt at extenuation of any of her actions, from the night when Harnett had come to the presbytère for the first time, to the evening when she had walked deliberately past her protesting mother, out of the house; had gone, in the face of the peering village, up the main street to the inn, and to Harnett's room, and had got, before she left there, his promise to leave St. Hilaire on the following day.

"I wanted him to be gone before you came," she ended, "and in the morning he was well enough to be helped out to the malle and drive to the railroad. That was three days ago. When he is ready to have me, I will follow him."

"Will he marry you?" her brother asked. His voice was hard and even.

Anne met his eyes as she had met the half-tearful and imploring ones of young Tetrault a week before, and her face was as white as it had been then. "It is I who will not marry *him*," she said. It was quiet and it was not defiant, but it had all of her will behind it — a will that even Jean had never made anything by trying to oppose. He did not speak at once. He turned into the road and walked back and forth several times. Anne broke off a branch of a red-berried mountain ash before her and brushed the needles from the fir-trunk with it carefully. Jean came back and stopped in front of her again.

"You will not marry *him*," — he repeated it, — "will you tell me why?" And he stood as still as before, listening, with what might have seemed patience, to what he knew very well were Harnett's specious pretexts, elaborated by Anne's faith and sympathy into a defence, — the defence of a man whose despicableness was patent and passing all comprehension, who was ready to take advantage of a woman's generosity and devotion to let her make the sacrifice of everything for his gratification, who would not give even his own temporary ease in exchange. And worse yet, a man who meanly lied, and whined that he was not his own master. Jean Carmel had his opinion of an able-bodied man who could not be his own master, his own breadwinner, and it was untempered in its severity by any traditions of an older land and

civilization. He was himself the son of nine generations of men who had made their own way in the wilderness and in the face of every odds. A man who could forswear his manhood to keep his comfort and station and friends, even his home — Jean Carmel had large toleration by nature and by reason of a priest's much knowledge of the human heart, but his charity did not extend to this.

"You must try to see it as he sees it, Jean," Anne urged on him. "Position and wealth and ambition mean so much more to him than they possibly can to us. We have never had them, nor any hope of them. We cannot judge." But Jean Carmel did judge. "If I were to marry him, I would be ruining his life," said Anne.

"And you prefer to ruin your own?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered conclusively. She was twirling the branch of mountain ash and watching it. Then she looked up.

"But it seems to me that a life like yours is the ruined one," she said thoughtfully, and her eyes went over the cassock. "I hope you will never know how ruined." And he saw behind her face the full force of the passion with which he had to deal. He passed his hand across his forehead.

The wind gave a long moan through the trees and beat even the undergrowth down. A big drop fell on his face. He looked up beyond the tree-tops, far

above, where he could see a little of the sky. It was almost black. Out through the opening where the fir had fallen, the other hills were no longer visible. There was a sheet of swishing rain between, and surging toward him. He turned away deliberately and went to where his hat lay, took it up, and put it under a jut of lichened rock. Then he went back and laid his hand on Anne's shoulder, and drew her away under a big pine. The rain would not come there for some time yet, if at all, and the drifting of needles and leaves and crumbled cones was quite dry.

The branches were too low for them to stand. Anne sat staring out at the lashing rain. In the gloom her face showed vague and luminous-eyed, and very white under its crushed yellow crown. She did not look uneasily bold now, only tired and broken.

"Where has he gone — Harnett?" asked Jean. She had taken good care to avoid the use of any but the surname.

Anne shook her head. "I will not tell you," she said. He knew that she would not.

"Nor in what part of England his home is, I suppose?"

"Nor where his home is," said Anne. Canada and England were wide for a village priest of small means. It would not be easy to find a man of whom he knew no more than that he was called Harnett. And Anne had thought of all those things, and more, in the week past.

Did she know who he was, this improbable uncle who seemed the arbiter of the destinies of a grown man? he inquired. It was a shaft he could not resist.

"Yes," she told him, unaffected. "I know that, and I know where he lives. He is not improbable."

"Between him and yourself, at any rate," he suggested, "this Harnett appears to be a good deal of a shuttlecock." A dull anger was flushing over Anne's face. She was not often angry—only once or twice that he could recall—but it was a hard and enduring temper, unpleasant to rouse. And it was not worth while rousing it for the poor satisfaction of having his say about the man. It would lose him any little influence he might still be able to exert—the only influence which would have the smallest effect. Madame Carmel's could do nothing but harm. She and Anne had small admiration for one another's characteristics, and no traits whatever in common.

Madame Carmel was of those who, given several probable motives, always ascribe the least creditable. That it could be possible for an evil course of action to start from good but misguided impulses, from generosity and loyalty, courage and devotion, would be entirely beyond her comprehension. "She thinks all my mind must be unclean," Anne had bitterly put it. He could entirely believe it. And she had blundered inexcusably. She had watched Anne. "At night," had explained his sister. "She thought,

I suppose, that I would be afraid of the dark." To have watched Anne! Any one knowing her in the least might have known better than to do that. From the time that she, as a small child, had first been able to act on her own initiative, there had been no way to manage her save only to put her upon her honor. But it was a lesson her mother had never seemed to learn, and a steady antagonism had resulted.

However, he had Anne's word for it that there had been, so far, no worse than the two night meetings, and those appearances of evil which Harnett had encouraged and she herself had taken not the least care to avoid. And Harnett, moreover, had gone away. The chances of its being the last that Anne would ever hear of him were, Jean Carmel figured it, rather better than good. The gallantries of his wanderings in remote and uncivilized spots, Harnett very probably did not make a habit of carrying on into his conventional life. And that he loved Anne did not even suggest itself to the Curé. His own conception of love did not admit the possibility of harming the beloved, of belittling her or letting her suffer in any way. As he could understand it, its first principle must be a desire to protect.

So he saw room for hoping a good end. But no good end was to be reached by annoying Anne, stirring up her long anger. In that event she would be entirely capable of leaving St. Hilaire altogether.

Anne had picked up a pine cone and was crumbling it in her fingers. A drop of rain came through the thick mass of pine and fell on her hand. She brushed it away and shifted her position. She looked sullen and at bay. The storm was at its full force, the wind surged and roared, the trees were creaking and muttering, the lighter ones, the birch and maple and ash, whipped, and the loose leaves on the vines clung and shivered. A chipmunk passed in a red-brown whisk across the road and scurried up a trunk. There was a good fresh smell of wet earth and mould, and of balsams and cedar.

He changed his sarcasm to a tone of quiet, dispassionate reasoning, and tried to make her see it all as he saw it, as any one but herself inevitably must. But it made no impression.

Harnett was not the one to be blamed, she kept to it; only herself. "I could say to him that he must give up fortune and success and friends and his home and everything for which he had ever cared. I could tell him that he was to spend the rest of his life poor and hard at work and hopeless; and in exchange for all that I could offer him a love too selfish to make any sacrifice of its own. He would do it, yes, but, Jean, he would," she insisted, losing patience, "I tell you he would be only too glad to. But—do you yourself think that such a bargaining sort of love would be worth the sacrifice?"

"Though he lost all," he reminded her, "yet would he gain his own soul. And the fortune and ambition and friends for which a man must sell his right to his own judgment and conscience and instincts — they are worse than not worth having. They are his destruction — and so," he added unhesitatingly, "so is the woman who helps him to sin to keep them."

Anne did not answer. She put up her arms, clasped her hands behind her head and looked out at the driving sheets of rain and the darkening afternoon.

How much of all this, he asked her presently, had she told her mother. "Nothing," she said shortly. "Anything that she knows she has found out from others — from anybody in the parish who wanted to carry tales, I expect." He could see that the antagonism was stronger than ever. It was unfortunate. "No," she said, "she may think what she pleases — and of course it will be the worst."

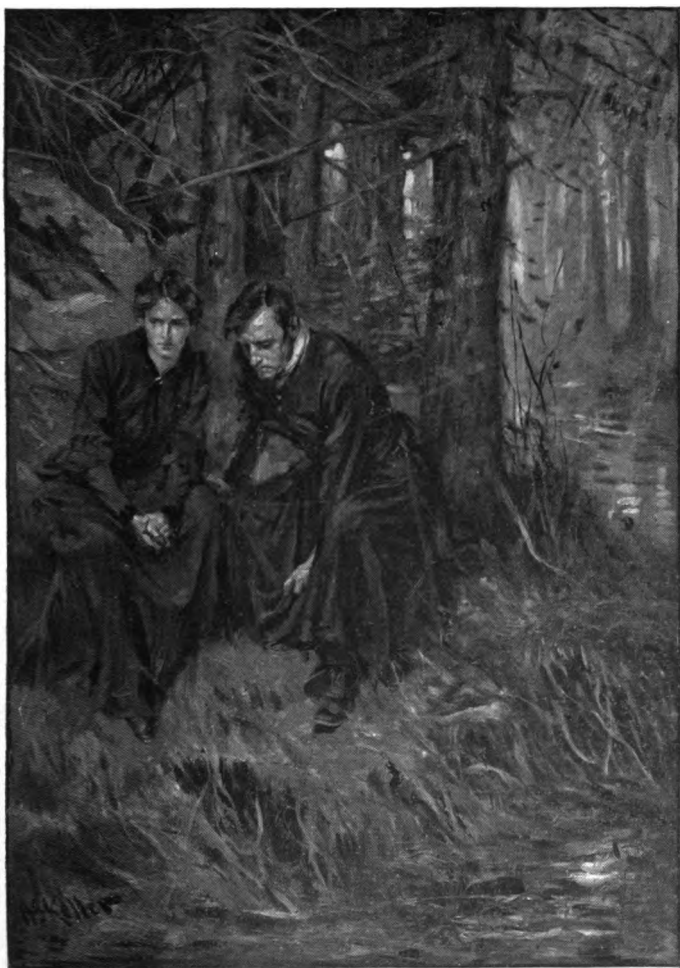
She was stubborn and she was not repentant, but, at any rate there was nothing abject about her, and resolute wrong-doing could have a dignity of its own, the dignity of strength, whether directed ill or well. He could not help an admiration of a sort. It was with some natures as with some big trees, not until they had fallen did you realize their full proportions.

She turned and faced him abruptly, brushing the crumbled cones from her dress with a sweep of her hands. "I can go away, if you think I should," she

offered. "I have thought it all over. I can work somewhere, at something, until he is ready to have me with him. And I am not the sort of a woman to be in a presbytère. I know that well enough. It isn't as if I were repentant — then perhaps it would be your duty to take me back. But I am not sorry," she was speaking quickly, trying to make it even and indifferent. "I would have gone before, only I wanted you to know that I am not altogether bad. I knew, of course, that you would never think as mother does," her lips thinned with annoyance, "and that you would not even pity me in the contemptuous way the others do. But I wanted *you* to understand. What the rest think doesn't matter." It had always mattered so little to Anne what the "rest" should elect to think. "And now that you know," she finished, "I will go away if I had better. You are a curé, and I am not the sort of woman for your home. I will understand."

But the corners of her mouth quivered in spite of herself, and her hands were pressed together to keep them still. Her eyes had dropped. He sat and looked at her until she had to raise them. His face was stern. "Anne," he told her then, "you have said a great many things that have hurt me to-day, but none so much as this."

An end of the old, travel-worn, earth-stained cassock was close to her. She put out her fingers and touched it, stroking it softly.



“‘Anne,’ he told her then, ‘you have said a great many things that have hurt me to-day — but none so much as this.’”

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After a while she clasped her hands in her lap again and sat still. Her eyes, shining in the twilight, were not seeing the rain. She was not hearing the swish of the water as it came through the trees and on to the road, soaking into the brown drift and mould and beating the ferns to the earth. She began to rock herself back and forth, slowly. Her head drooped. The warm, brown hair had fallen loose and was curling from the knot in little damp tendrils. He reached out and touched it, and a tendril wound itself around one of his fingers. Would he have been more severe if she had been less beautiful—or more self-abasing?

She flung back her head suddenly and looked at him. "Jean, if he should never send for me, if he should change his mind, or forget me, or come to think me like any other woman who is only—bad—" she caught her breath hard and sat very still for a long moment. Then she threw herself down on the brown pine drift, with her head on her arms. The branches of the dark trees were beating about, and the rain poured down with an even, low roar, dripping steadily now, through the great pine, upon them both,—the priest in his black robe, and Anne huddled on the ground, face downward, a crown of crushed and stained yellow flowers upon her bowed head.

CHAPTER VII

DOUBTLESS it is because we grow tired of accepting ourselves as a little lower than the angels that we derive satisfaction from being able occasionally to consider ourselves as a little higher than the fallen Lucifer. We feel pleasure, not exactly in another's abasement, perhaps, but in our elevation by contrast therewith.

And by contrast with the Curé's sister the parishioners felt themselves good. That, together with the occupation of watching her and discussing her, gave their lives a more than common interest. The Curé permitted not the most distant reference to the matter, and Madame Carmel had ceased encouraging the topic; but Amélie Latouche kept her friends informed of Anne's least significant word and act, or such as she chose to consider significant. And the fact that the postmistress was true to the responsibilities of her office, and discussed nothing whatever connected with it, did not keep it from getting around that Anne was receiving letters from the Englishman and sending others to him. And it was Anne's fault.

She had gone to the little post-office room the day after Harnett had left the village. There were two women by the counter, who spoke to her with obvious uncertainty as to the effect it might have on their own reputation. Anne met their uncomfortable eyes somewhat arrogantly and answered. Then, with entire indifference to their presence, gave orders to the postmistress that any letters which might thenceforth come for herself were to be kept at the office and not sent to the presbytère.

Some ten days afterward a letter came, and Madame Tetrault was in the office when Anne got it. Madame Tetrault had not spoken to her at all, and had become entirely absorbed in an English Life Insurance Company's calendar on the wall,—the which she could not read. But as Anne passed the window on the porch outside, the sharp little eyes, made keen by malice, observed enough to justify the inference that the letter was not an ordinary one.

"It was from her lover?" she inquired of the postmistress. The postmistress did not know. But Madame Tetrault was in no wise baffled.

"You know where it was from," she insisted.

The postmistress had not tried to decipher the postmark, and she said so as she took out the Curé's mail from its pigeonhole and laid it ready for the sexton, who was coming across the street. Madame Tetrault treated that with the incredulity she hon-

estly thought it deserved. But she went and called on several wives, and gave her surmises for facts.

Anne took her letter and went through the gate of Coppée's lane, past the shed from which the drying tobacco leaves sent out their pungent odor, and up between the willows. They were yellowing and thinning. It was the first time she had come this way since the night when she had gone to meet Harnett. And she hurried now as she had hurried then. Only then it had been because she was afraid of the darkness, and now it was because she was afraid of the letter. "If he should not send for me, if he should change his mind, or forget me—" she had said to Jean. And it was the dread that was always underneath, with Jean's unbelief to foster it. It was because of it that she had brought the letter out to the quarry. If her dread were to be justified, no one should see her at first.

She went through the broken-barred gate and over to where the sumachs and crab-apples grew around the deep hole. There was nothing alive in sight except a mare and a colt in the pasture, and a blue-bird among the bushes. It startled her as it flew out, almost across her face. Her nerves were at the snapping tension. She climbed down into a hollow where a big block of stone had been taken out long enough before for the earth to have gathered again, and weeds and sumachs to have grown. And she

sat there, entirely hidden even from any one who might come into the pasture, and read the letter.

Harnett was in Quebec, and he had neither changed his mind nor forgotten her. His plans were what they had been from the first, as Anne had helped him to make them. He would wait in Canada through the winter, to be a little the nearer her. Then, when his uncle should have got back to London, he would go on himself and ask the permission to marry her—it might be in six months or perhaps more. If the permission were refused, the final decision would then remain with her. And Anne saw no avoidance of direct issues in the wording, which was carefully noncommittal. She was satisfied, more than satisfied. She sat for a long time with the letter in one hand and her chin in the palm of the other, bent forward. Then, after a while, she stood up and clambered farther down, into the bottom of the quarry. She went to the spot where Harnett had fallen and lain. There was no mark of the fall, no torn ground, no blood on the stones or weeds, though his head had bled so that it had soaked the shawl she had rolled under it when she had left him to go for Coppée. Where the sumach branches had cracked under the crashing weight was almost hidden in the mass of gorgeous leaves.

Nature does not love the past. She builds upon it and covers it up, absorbing it into always renewing life.

It is only man who lots off as sacred ground the spot of a tragedy and commemorates it, who marks the lying-places of dead bodies. Nature obliterates quickly the traces of the struggles for life and death, and the uncounted numbers of *her* dead, little and great, leave no token. The pathway of man is marked with the mound and the cairn and the headstone ; there is rarely a bone by the trail of the wild thing, rarely the tiny, fine, ant-swarmling skeleton of a bird beneath the tree where thousands have sung. The dead of Nature buries her dead, and life comes forth — a better sign of Faith and of Hope than man can show, and a better Charity.

Little in the quarry indicated the short human struggle of a few days past, as nothing in the woods beyond the farm clearings gave token of the slaughter of their moose herds a quarter of a century before, when the place had been well named Hormah for its utter destruction, and the air of the mountains had been turned fetid until the hundreds upon hundreds of bodies — hide-stripped for the covering of an army's feet — had gone back to the soil which was even then coming with swift certainty under the dominion of man.

Anne took up a dry branch and measured with it the depth of the big rain-pool. It was more than two feet, and large enough to have covered a man's whole body easily. It looked dark in the shadow

of the thick bushes, and it was coated with green scum. Harnett had fallen close beside it. Half a yard farther, and not until the summer should have dried down the pool, would any one have known what had become of the English hunter who had camped across the river for a couple of weeks, and who had been seen so often with Mademoiselle Carmel. No one would have known—except he who had thrown the stone. And Anne had found out that it was Paul Tetrault.

He braved the taunts and wrath of his mother, and refused persistently either to pay court to the daughter of Lavisse, or to ignore Anne Carmel. He went to the presbytère occasionally, just as he had always done, and spoke to Anne openly and before all the assembled parish, after mass. It was after a mass, when they stood on the wide steps of the church,—left well to themselves by the other covertly eyeing groups—that Anne had asked him composedly why he had tried to kill Harnett. He made shift to deny it. He had not tried to kill Harnett—what did she mean? But the color was all out of his bright cheeks. “I mean,” said Anne, “that I am quite sure it was you who threw the stone.”

He kept on trying to insist the contrary, but in the end he admitted it. “It was to save you, Anne. But I did not know what I was doing. It was to save you—you won’t tell?” Some of the terror of

the night, when he had grovelled under the wall and thought of the body down in the bottom of the old quarry, showed in his eyes. She looked at him speculatively. He was a poor sort of man, with his kinking light hair and plump pink cheeks, and his little courage which was not ready to take the consequences of his own acts. And yet—he had the courage to be the only one in the parish who was not decidedly cautious about being seen near her.

“No,” she had said, “I will not tell.”

She went back to the presbytère. The Curé was in the garden with the bedeau digging up the bulbs of the dahlias. Anne stood watching them until the man went away to ring the noon bells. “I have had a letter, Jean,” she said. He stood with his clumsily booted foot on the spade, and waited.

“Yes?” he said.

“Only that it may be half a year or even more before I go away.” Time was what he reckoned with. He was glad to hear it.

“Why?” he asked. She told him. He allowed himself no comment. “Where is the uncle?” he wanted to know. She told him. He was travelling around the world. “I see,” he said, and went on with his digging. He was acquiring something like a respect for Harnett’s inventive powers.

Afterward, the long winter that followed in the presbytère was not easy for Anne. She got many

blows, but they were never of those scourges we braid ourselves for the lashing of our own backs. She was not troubling herself with any regrets, and her brother could not bring her to it. He tried only once, and produced no effect. He abandoned it as useless for a time yet. "Most of us," he finished, "think at the time, that we do well to sell the birthright of contentment for the red pottage of a short felicity—and it is not until later that there comes the bitter cry."

"There will be no bitter cry from me," Anne told him. "I will take what comes without complaining."

"And then—" she leaned forward on the table with her long, firm hands clasped in the circle of the lamp-light, and followed out his argument, "and then—it seems to me, that to love and be loved is the birthright. The world tries to buy it from us with what it calls honor and a good name, with money or position—but it is our birthright, nevertheless." She decided it to her own satisfaction.

"No," he contradicted her, "it is to do one's duty in that state of life to which one has been called."

She shook her head.

And the state of life to which she was called just then was not pleasant to Anne. The attitude of the parishioners—condescension, pity, accentuated kindness, or holding aloof, according to their stamp of mind—was only one degree less unendurable than that of her mother.

Madame Carmel's every look and word was a reproach, taking that form most trying to the sinner's patience, an insisistently uncomplaining martyrdom. It was against that that Anne made her one protest, and then only after she had borne it most of the winter.

Madame Carmel had gone off to bed. Anne had watched the figure, so like her own still, until the door had closed behind it. She spoke then through shut teeth. "Jean, I shall say something I shall be sorry for unless she changes that mournful look for just one hour." He attempted a defence, but she put it off. "She is saddened, yes, of course, and I have hurt her,—I know all that. She takes good care that I shall. She wants me to feel how unworthy and wicked I am. But I don't—and that is certainly not the way to go about it." Her lip curled. She was getting embittered. "And she wears that mournful smile of forgiveness whenever I come in sight," she went on angrily; "she is forever kissing me and taking me in her arms. I don't like that. I never did, and she knows it. I may be a miserable sinner, but I'd rather she'd find some other way of making me realize it." She shrugged her shoulders and went back to the book which was open in front of her. Then she glanced up again. "There are so many fashions of saying 'neither do I condemn thee,' and most of them are more humiliating than to be stoned."

But the Curé could see another side to it. His

mother was brought low before the eyes of all the parish. And she was a proud woman, though her pride might not be of that finer temper which disdains to bid for sympathy. She had held her head well up in the village. And she could not now, when it was a charity of any journalier's daughter to speak to her own. She had, too, a dominating nature, the which Anne had deliberately put aside and refused to submit to. Anne had disobeyed flagrantly and set her authority entirely at naught. Madame Carmel had not heavy and meeting black eyebrows for nothing, and she was enraged — a rage that took the form of a fixed smile and caresses. But most of all she was a bigoted woman in her religion, and it was really a terrible thing to her that her daughter neither confessed now, nor received the Blessed Sacrament. To have an outcast upon earth in one's family was bad enough — but an outcast from Heaven as well! Heaven and Hell were as close and real and material to Madame Carmel as ever they were to the Huron missionaries. To be in Heaven oneself and have one's daughter in the eternal abode of sinners would be, on an intensified scale, much the same as to be law-abiding and yet have a child in the penitentiary. Madame saw a stigma attaching to herself hereafter as well as here, in consequence of Anne's refusal to partake of the mysteries of the faith on the insufficient grounds that her frame of mind was not fitting. The letter and not the spirit

was the weightier matter of Madame Carmel's religious law, precisely as it was that of those Jesuit fathers who stopped at no untruth or subterfuge to obtain the one drop of water which alone would render the baptism of the most unbelieving convert efficacious.

The Curé was not so intolerant of all these things as was Anne; he had twelve years more of experience in life than she, and much more knowledge than she could ever have of the human soul, which had been so often laid bare and bleeding before him. He sympathized with Anne; the force of her objection to the persistent smile was apparent to him. But he was also sorry for his mother.

The mail delivery was more or less uncertain at St. Hilaire in the best of seasons, and many a letter disappeared for good and all somewhere along its route. But in winter the conditions were much worse, and as a result there was an interval of six weeks, toward the close of the winter, during which Anne did not hear from Harnett. The Curé guessed it from the hollowing of her eyes and other signs, which escaped Madame Carmel, absorbed in her own misfortunes. But he did not question. Then the letters began to come again, two together, the first more than a month old. Anne did her work about the house and the church, and helped her brother with his duties of charity; but the rest of the time she spent in her own cold room, reading and rereading the letters and writing answers to

them. Usually she locked the door. But once she forgot it, and Jean, on his way to his own room, stopped to speak to her. It was already after twelve o'clock. He had been out through the miles of snow to see Mademoiselle Lavissee, who was dying slowly, for all that she was an heiress, because her father did not recognize the necessity of going to the expense of sending a long distance for a doctor. The Curé opened Anne's door quietly. She was sitting up in her bed, a patch quilt wrapped around her. There were loose sheets of the letters in her lap, and another she held pressed against her cheek with both hands. The light from the candle glowed red through her hair. Her eyes were shut and she was rocking to and fro, as she had had a way of doing in her childhood, when she was either very happy or very miserable. He knew that she was very happy now. She had not heard the door open. He moved back quietly and shut it and left her alone.

And Anne sat holding the letters much farther into the night.

CHAPTER VIII

THE Curé came out in front of the presbytère. It was only just after sunrise. There had been rain, but it had stopped, and now there was a softly blue sky, with flecking gold and white clouds, mare's-tails of white, sun-tipped, streaming over it, streaks of faint pink above the hills to the north, and the hills themselves sun-crested, with sharp, dark shadows in their ravines. The tree-tops were gold-crested, too, and the smoke, pouring up from the village chimneys, vapory mother-of-pearl, yellow and rose and white. Just over to the right of the church there was a grove of firs, sombre among their trunks, shining on their high tips, and in front of them was a line of birches, a white tracery against the dark green. There were maples by the gate, fluffing delicately out into pale green-yellow, and a red maple here and there, tasselling and etched in crimson. He looked over it all, then went around to his garden at the side of the house.

There was some one there before him. It was Yvonne Armaillé. She was standing under a budding apple tree, and when she saw the Curé coming she backed up

against the trunk, and put her finger into her mouth, and hung her head to one side. Her bare toes were much turned in. Yvonne was six years old and very plump indeed. Her cheeks puffed out red and round, and her arms and her legs were shapeless. Her hair was braided into two tight, black, short pigtails, that stuck out on either side, stiff, finished with pieces of scarlet cotton torn into strips. She was a funny picture of embarrassment, but the Curé refrained from laughing. He only smiled. "Bon jour, ma fille," he said.

Yvonne did not answer, merely stood with her mouth open and her finger in it. What could he do for her? he asked. He took it for granted that she wanted something. It was not any one's custom to be in his garden at that hour of the morning, least of all was it Yvonne's. For Yvonne was the victim of extreme and exaggerated bashfulness. The fact that she was the greatest heiress of the parish did not give her assurance. It merely drew upon her an amount of attention from which she suffered painfully, though not to the detriment of her general health. What could he do for her? the Curé repeated, going nearer. And she did not answer still. The Curé had had experience with her before, and he thought it probable that with proper preliminaries and the exercise of great tact and diplomacy, and by avoiding anything that might remotely suggest the matter in hand, she might be brought to

give some sort of utterance to it. So he smiled again and turned his attention to his early spring flowers, pulling up a weed or two and taking off some blighted leaves. He glanced once from under his eyelids. Yvonne's finger was out of her mouth. Unfortunately she saw the glance. The finger went back again and the toes, twisting nervously, turned yet farther in. The Curé resumed the care of his flowers. The result of this, after five minutes, was a deadlock. The Curé decided it must be broken. "Viens regarder mes fleurs," he said, and held out his hand. It was to be obeyed as a command.

When the Curé said, "Come look at my flowers," one went and looked at his flowers, though one might be enduring all things possible to the bashful. One also put one's hand into the enormously big one that covered it all up, pudgy as it was. Yvonne went to look at the flowers. But she looked straight in front of her, fixedly, her finger in her mouth, her head bobbing on her white, creased neck, as she let herself be half dragged along. She was getting no pleasure out of the Curé's daffodils and tulips and hyacinths, of which he was so proud. To be sure, before the Curé had put in his appearance and terrified her into something approaching coma, she had enjoyed the hyacinths. She had bent down over them and smelled them with her nose and mouth. But now she had neither sense nor senses. She was the merest

piece of fat little girl, stumping along beside an enormous man in black—and that man, yet more awful, the Curé. If she could have spoken, she could not have remembered what it was she had come for. So the elaborate diplomacy of Monsieur Carmel failed in the end, after all. He might talk of flowers, addressing and looking at nothing more personal than the air in front of him, or he might keep silence, or he might question again, as he finally did; but nothing was to be known.

Therefore he decided that he would go to see Yvonne's great-grandmother, Elise Ségur, the relative with whom she lived. It might be that the old woman had sent the child with a message of importance. "Allons—we will go see the little mamma," he said.

If the very springs of sound had not been paralyzed, Yvonne would have howled with terror at that. Had she been bad? She knew she had been incredibly bold. Was she to be taken home to be punished? It did not occur to the Curé that he had put her in such a state. His tone had been as kind as he could make it. To be sure, he had not looked at her, but that was because he was afraid of embarrassing her yet more. He was quite unaware that it was a victim who was dragged, clumping along beside him, for all that he tried to bring his steps down to hers.

But it turned out that the great-grandmother wanted nothing. The little wrinkled face inside the

nightcap was as cheerful as possible. Elise Ségur was not ill. She was very active. But she was distressed that her child should have troubled Monsieur the Curé, and she scolded until that small person, completely overcome, let her bowed knees give way under her, and collapsed to the floor — still in speechlessness.

The Curé abandoned his efforts and went back home. But when he came out from mass Yvonne was there again. Her pigtails still stuck out, and her mouth was still open and occupied by a forefinger, and her black eyes fixed themselves on the Curé's face and never left it. They rolled about in round inexpressiveness, following him as he moved. He made another attempt with no more success.

But he was interested now. He was sure there was something she wanted to say. Yvonne either could not or would not tell him, however, so he went into the house and left her standing there, staring after him unhappily. He spoke to his mother about it and asked her to make a trial. Madame Carmel went out and used every blandishment. She could not even succeed in getting the child to come near her, and when she herself approached, Yvonne backed off precipitately.

There is small fact in that which is said of the intuition of children. They are either capricious in their fancies and smile alike on the just and the unjust, the sinner and the saint, the kind-hearted and the cruel, or they are to be lured by benefits. But this

much is true—that they can read anger or steady grief in a face, and the former they are afraid of, the second they shrink from uneasily. If it is a burst of sorrow such as they themselves often know, they can understand and try to comfort. But no man or woman in whose face there is plain anger or plain unhappiness can win over a child. There was unhappiness writ so large on the face of madame that Yvonne would as soon have touched something baleful. Madame went in, but Yvonne kept on hanging around. She returned home at midday, but was promptly back. The Curé coming in and out found her always there, round-eyed, finger in mouth, pigeon-toed.

Anne tried it next. She almost brought speech by tactics of indifferent fellowship. “Eh bien, la petite!” she said, as she passed, and patted the smooth-parted, slicked little head. By and by she passed again, tending the flowers, paying no attention to the fixed eyes. “Qu’est-ce-que tu veux, hein? What are you after?” she said, but she did not even wait for the reply. Yvonne visibly took heart. She was summoning up courage. But the process was slow. All processes were with her. Nevertheless, she at last approached the hyacinth bed and spoke. Unfortunately her voice was utterly inaudible. Anne made a dire mistake. She should have kept silence at the juncture, and have allowed Yvonne to speak again at

her own will. But she looked up and said, "Hein?" Yvonne, startled, was thrown back into frozen silence. It was hopeless. Anne gave it up. She had other things to attend to and she went indoors.

Yvonne disappeared for a while after that. But she was back yet again. And this time there was expression in the round eyes—also latent tears. She was miserable. The Curé knew now that something was really the matter. He stooped down and picked her up in his arms. "What is it, little one?" he said. "Tell the Curé. Don't be afraid." He laid his face against her head.

Yvonne's heart was melted. She began to cry, and presently she sobbed out the trouble, a word or two at a time. It was her dog, her puppy. The lower lip quivered and went out wofully. Her puppy had a—a broken leg. The round head went down on Monsieur the Curé's shoulder, and she wailed aloud. He let her cry for a few minutes, patting her sturdy back.

"And you want me to see to it?" he asked then.

"Voui, M'sieu' le Cu—le Curé." He set her down on her feet.

"I must go to the church now for a little while," he said. "But run and get the little dog. Bring him to me, and I will see what I can do."

Yvonne hurried off so fast that she fell on the sidewalk, and as luck would have it her shiny button of

a nose went just where there was no grass, on the slabs of stone. Under ordinary circumstances she would have wailed aloud again. But she scrambled up and trotted on. Her nose was really considerably skinned, but what did that matter in such a juncture as this?

When Monsieur Carmel came out from the vestry, he went over to the side of the house and sat himself down on the doorstep. Yvonne followed him, the puppy in her arms. It was one of the very few dogs in the parish which was not a cur. It promised to be a good collie. The look of pain on its poor little face was truly pathetic. It might have touched the heart of a harder man than the Curé. And besides, the Curé was fond of dogs. His own came now and sat before him, cocking one ear, and wrinkling its forehead—more than inclined to be jealous.

The puppy's paw was unquestionably broken. It had come too near the heifer at milking time the night before—smelling the milk that was to be its supper. And the heifer had kicked out. Yvonne grew quite communicative, forgetting herself in her sympathy with the little animal, and keeping her plump hand upon its head, while the Curé examined the leg. The puppy had cried and cried, she said. It had made so much noise that p'tite maman had had it shut up in the barn all night.

Then Yvonne herself had cried also. The Curé

managed by valiant effort to remain serious. But he had visions of the irascible old dame, with a whimpering puppy on one side, and Yvonne howling on the other. For there was not usually anything quiet about Yvonne's grief in its acute stages. The child went on. She had wanted p'tite maman to let Jacques, the man, do something for the puppy. But the answer had been that plenty of puppies had broken legs, and got well enough for all practical purposes, in time. Those of the peasants whom hardship and denseness and age had hardened were not over merciful to their beasts. The most that had been allowed the collie had been a saucer of milk. Yvonne had taken that herself, and had wept over the puppy, coaxing it to eat. "But it wouldn't," she told him. "It just cried and cried."

"And so you thought it a matter to which only the Curé could attend?"

Yvonne did not understand, but she said "Voui, M'sieu' le Curé." She, too, had been trained in politeness.

The mending of the paw was a tedious affair. The puppy was good, only whining in an undertone, and just once trying its tiny white teeth on the Curé's finger, when the pain of the neglected fracture was especially sharp. It was not a bite—for it knew that what was being done was for its own good—only a pressure of protest and suffering. Yvonne

stroked the silky head and murmured, "Courage, courage," while the tears rolled over her cheeks. Pilote came nearer and licked a pink hind paw that hung out helplessly. Anne stood above them in the doorway, watching. It was she who made a splint out of black-birch bark, and produced bandages. "There is a liniment," suggested the Curé. Once his mother had had a sprained wrist and had used arnica. The bottle was still on hand. Madame found it and brought it, and they all assisted at the surgery. The neighbors saw that something was going on and some of them came to the fence and commented, questioning and giving advice respectfully. The Curé was serious and absorbed; his big hands were very gentle.

"And now," he said, when it was all done and the puppy's pink tongue tried a tentative lick at his finger, which unfortunately tasted of arnica—"now we will keep the little dog here until it is well, if you like." He did not say so, but he had fears of the great-grandmother's patience with an invalid of the sort. Probably Yvonne had thought that all out previously, for she agreed at once; and understanding the half-expressed was not common with her.

So the assembled populace dispersed, and the collie was put in a box full of soft rags, by the fire. Yvonne gave it a last pat. Then she stood up and went to the Curé. She took his hand and put her

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crimson lips to it. But, on the instant, she saw that Madame Carmel was watching her. Her bashfulness came back twofold. She ran all four fingers into her opened mouth and sidled slowly out of the room.

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CHAPTER IX

JEAN CARMEL had not had a satisfactory Sunday afternoon. There had been vespers, and he had made a short address. He had talked down to the level of his people. And talking down to a lower understanding is always much more exhausting than any amount of striving upward toward a higher plane. After that he had come out from the church and had spoken to those who had waited to see him. The conversations had not been uplifting, certainly — small woes, and gossip and complaints, or, infinitely worse, small moralizings of the cheapest stamp. Very vital to the moralizers, in a few cases, they were perhaps — in most, obviously designed to be edifying to the priest.

Then he had gathered a bunch of the lilacs which were just fully in bloom in the presbytère garden, and had taken them over to Madame Lavissee. The daughter had died at the end of the winter, and grief had left the woman half foolish. She had sobbed over her troubles to-day as he had already heard her do uncounted times before. Lavissee had told, with elaborate detail, of a cow that had calved and of how his

chickens would not lay. The daughter-in-law had gone into minutiae of her baby's doings. And he had come out feeling that his mind had been made for wider themes. Moreover, the scent of the lilacs he had carried in his arms to Madame Lavissee had brought up to him as he had walked between the meadows the memory of the lilac time in France. Just after his ordination he had travelled on the continent for a year, and made a pilgrimage to Rome with another priest. It was the thing he had enjoyed most in his life. And sometimes he knew what it meant—*la nostalgie des grandes routes*. He had it now, that longing for the open roads—and a longing for the speech of open minds.

But neither was to be gratified, or was justifiable. He stopped thinking about it and walked with a longer stride down the road, and turned off from there into the woods. They were the woods through which the highway from the railroad ran. He struck into that, coming out on it just at the top of a knoll. He was in a grove of maples and birch and beech for the most part, and the trunks were slender, and the leafage light as yet, so that he could look over the village to the sunset where the flaming of the furnace heart burst through a bank of dark clouds and the trees stood out distinct against it, every branch black, as if charred by the fire.

A big crow, glossy and cumbersome, swooped off from a limb and went flying away straight for the sun-

set. He watched it. It cawed, and the harsh sound came back to him. Then there was another sound, of voices and footsteps. Some one was coming. He turned to look, but there was a bend in the road a few feet away. A yellow shaft from the sunset fell just then, slanting along the opening between the thin rows of trees. A woman came out into it. She stopped short and stood in the ray, dazzled. Two men were just behind, a young one and an older. They were neither French nor habitant. The Curé's hat was in his hand. His head was erect in the yellow light, outlined by the glow. "Good evening," he said civilly, and moved from the way to let them pass.

But they did not go on. They came up to him and began to ask questions. Did monsieur speak English? (and monsieur knew at once that they were from the States). The girl watched him as he bowed the fine head gravely. Then, was that the village of St. Hilaire down below—the scattered white houses and the church? He told them that it was. There was an inn there, they had understood. He looked dubious at that. There was an inn, of a sort, yes; but hardly the sort to which a woman would care to go; hardly more than a tavern. The Curé's English, as the result of much reading and little practice, was rather classic than colloquial.

The men were inclined to be resentful. They had been told at the railroad station that there was a good

inn at St. Hilaire. They had ridden part of the way in a charette, then they had got out to walk and sent the charette ahead with their bundles. As for themselves, the inn would not matter—but— The Curé deprecated it. St. Hilaire was not often honored with travelers, only at best an occasional habitant on his journeys, or a hunter going into the bush, or some one with things to sell. Perhaps there was some house—but the families of the villagers were large and the cottages small. "However," he told them, "I have a mother and a sister—and the presbytère is at the service of—madame."

She corrected it with a rather listless smile. "Mademoiselle," she said.

A young villager and a girl came toward them and passed with a "Bon soi" and a stare. They were arm in arm, and the man was smoking a pipe. At the turn of the road the man stopped and watched deliberately.

The Curé and the other three stood talking for a few moments. Then they started off in the direction of the village.

The Curé went fast, because he was accustomed to doing so. Anne was, as a rule, the only woman who could keep up with him. But this one had a long, swinging step as practised as Anne's. In some ways she was not altogether unlike his sister, he thought. She was tall, too, but more slender. She was not so

erect, and did not give the same impression of strength. Anne was of the forest, but this one was of the garden, rather. Anne's hair was dark brown and full of color; this one had hair the color of long field grass dried in the sun. She talked with something the listlessness of her smile. The two men, she told him, were her uncle and his son. The one was a naturalist who was studying the flora and the birds. The other was an artist. He might have learned more, but the uncle came up and she dropped back, walking with her cousin.

They were on the level now, going into the village. The road was dusty. There was a field on either side yellow with dandelions and white with the star-of-Bethlehem drifting in patches like a thin fall of snow. The shadow of some big knotted willows just coming into leaf fell long over the grass, and the water in a stony little ditch by the wayside rippled along with a clear, sweet sound. Except for that there was only the quick chirp of a flock of robins hopping about in one of the fields, their breasts very red in the low light.

In the village itself the people gathered in the doorways to look at them. These were the strangers whose fame and effects had preceded them. The effects had gone to the inn, but the strangers passed it by. They went on to the end of the street, to the presbytère, and stopped at the gate. Then the men came back to the inn and the woman went up the path with

the Curé. Some of them began to bethink themselves of advice, spiritual or material, they would want that evening.

There was only one person in the room when the Curé put the door open and stood aside. She was in front of the large open fire, bending over a box from which the head of a small collie puppy showed. A bristly yellow dog was near her.

"Anne," spoke the Curé. She stood up and turned. "I have brought you a guest," he said. The girl by the fire looked at the one on the threshold in the twilight — and their attitudes were those of the woman in disgrace and the woman who has never known it. It was a quick look from Anne. Then her head went back with a defensive movement. Her brother saw it and understood in a flash. There occurred to him then what had occurred to her on the instant. Was she the woman with whom another woman would care to be thrown unwarned?

The Curé's voice was determined. "It is my sister, mademoiselle," he said, "Anne Carmel." Anne accepted it then. The responsibility was his. The girl on the threshold came forward. "And I," she offered, "am Cecily Thorne."

CHAPTER X

THE leaven of the creeds of Revenge is working still in the measures of the creed of Love. And it is a view of the matter eminently Christian that the body and intellect a little less than perfect should be dedicated to the service of the altar of God — though the gods of Eleusis and Delphi, of Thebes and of the North, may have had the best — and the sons of Levi were assuredly not weaklings.

Doubtless there is to account for it the peaceful basis of the faith itself, and the fact that the faithful have not yet recognized and accepted its ultimity in so far as to disassociate forbearance and impotence.

And it was natural enough that Cecily Thorne should have looked on it as rather a waste of fine material that Jean Carmel should be the curé of a remote backwoods village, devoting distinctly tangible strength to the care of the intangible soul. As a Franciscan or a Jesuit missionary, such as in the old days had gone forth into the wilderness to meet the savage and to share his life, it would have been conceivable that the robes of a priest should have covered the form of an athlete. But there

was surely a question of its appropriateness here in an habitant parish. A Curé mildly benign in age and a little feeble, or a little heavy with long ease, a small, meagre, or insignificant man, could have served the purpose as well.

Lying in Anne's bed and looking into the darkness, she seemed to see a bared head outlined against the hot yellow light of the sunset. The head was suggestive of more power than could be needed in this parish. Yet that perhaps was a distorted view to take of it, after all; and, since perfection and strength were at the creation, to a normal mind it should have seemed altogether suitable that here, where nature was none the less magnificent for being peaceful, a priest in keeping with the surroundings should serve the God of Peace.

And existence itself was surely peaceful here, she concluded—a conclusion old as the dreams of theorists who color life with their fancies, rather than their fancies with life, and who have chosen to ignore that to dwell close to nature is to dwell close to the material, to be in the stage of human development which deals much with the colors of passions and little with the shades of sentiment.

Cecily Thorne settled it out of hand to her own satisfaction that Anne Carmel was happy. Her life would insure that—although it might well be the result of locality rather than of temperament. Anne's temperament was problematical. And it was a prob-

lem that Mathew Thorne was already trying to work out. It was to be hoped he would not find it of unduly absorbing interest. She had watched him during the evening when they had all been together in the presbytère sitting room, and she had seen that he was speculating as to Anne. He would do well not to bring any disturbing influences into the little family.

And the Curé's sister had a lover no doubt, some young French Canadian of the better class, probably. The only wonder was that she was not long since married. She was four and twenty—and girls married young here. She would love simply, too, and without splitting the golden cord into a thousand fine wires that would cut first and snap afterward. She would marry and have children, many of them in all likelihood. In due course she would have grandchildren. Then she would die, a good Catholic, quite sure of Heaven, once she should have got absolution from her aged brother, — or perhaps from the curé who should have come after, — since superb young priests must grow old in their ministrations and pass away to where the beauty and strength of the dust avail not.

The big pines of these forests became bare in time, and the gray and green lichens covered them, and the moss hung from dried and brittle branches, and they fell, and for a while there was a mound where they were mouldering. Then even that was gone.

But Anne — she would have been satisfied and quite

happy. What else could happen where there was no field for ambition and hardly more for envy, where wealth and poverty were both moderate, and civilization produced no complications? Everything was surely normal here, and the very atmosphere gave rest to the weary — such as was Cecily herself — and sleep.

But Anne lay awake all night. She had had a letter, an almost illegible half-dozen lines, from Harnett. He was ill and in a hospital. The wound in his head was giving new trouble. There was rather more than the possibility of danger.

She had not spoken of it even to Jean, and all the evening, as she had sat with the others around the fire, she had given no sign. But when Mathew Thorne had said good night he had felt that her hand was unsteady and icy cold, and had given a quick look of surprise.

In the early morning she went into the sitting room. Jean was asleep there. He had turned over his own room to her, and had put a husk mattress in front of the fireplace on the bright striped bit of rag carpet. There was a gray blanket with a red border covering him to the chin, and he looked more like a soldier who had thrown himself down to rest where he might, than like a priest. One hand was uncovered and just touched the collie puppy. He had taken it from its box, and it had curled in close to him, its little white and fawn-colored nose between its paws — one of them still splinted and bandaged.

Anne, like some dark-robed, white-faced embodiment of a long night tragedy coming out into the dreary day, stood looking down at him. Probably he had read until late. Pilote, on the rag carpet at his head, waked, moved, and got up, stretching and yawning lazily, and came over to Anne, following her when she went out to the kitchen.

When she came back half an hour later, Jean was up and dressed. He had built the fire—there were fires in the hearths and stoves of the presbytère long before and long after any other house in the parish indulged in them. It was looked upon as an extravagance, but excused upon the grounds of Monsieur Carmel's city birth and upbringing, which had had naturally a sybaritic tendency.

He was standing on one side of the hearth reading his Testament. Anne had a saucer of milk for the puppy. She set it on the floor, then stood opposite Jean, watching the flames smoking up yellow and blue, from the new wood.

He stopped reading and observed her. She met his eyes before long, and knowing what they meant, shrugged her shoulders indifferently, forcing herself to smile. But it was a failure, and she gave over the attempt. "If I can help you—" he suggested.

"You can't," she told him; "nobody can."

He nodded and went on reading. Then he closed the little book. "There was once a heathen philosopher,"

he said slowly, "who believed in a very good way of finding peace, — to pray, not saying to ourselves, 'How shall I have this thing?' but rather, 'How shall I not desire to have it?'"

She stood thinking. The negative attitude of mind was not one to appeal to her especially. "You mean my love, I suppose," she said; "but I don't want to 'not desire to have it.' I — only you can't understand, Jean — you shouldn't, of course. And no one can explain."

He did not answer, and moved off to put the Testament back on the shelf. Then he went out to the kitchen and came in with an armful of wood, laid it beside the hearth, and brushed the chips and dust from his cassock.

"It is only," said Anne, without any preface, "that he is very ill." She had never yet let slip Harnett's name. "The wound in his head has been troubling him, and they have cut into it. He may die. He may be dead by now." Jean Carmel put down a quick hope that he might be.

"He may also be alive by now," he reminded her.

"Yes," she answered impatiently, "but I want to know." He realized that the suspense must go hard with her. She was of a nature so positive and decisive. What she determined she did — forthwith. She was of those who had rather blunder in haste than go right slowly. He remembered how, when she had been a

child, to be told "We will see," had roused all her temper. "Tell me I may *not* do it," she had said once, exasperated to shrillness and beating her clenched hands together, "but *don't* tell me you 'will see if I may.'" Uncertainty must go doubly hard with her.

She was standing very still, and her face was as gray as the light. The only color about her was the scintillation from the fire in her hair.

"I wonder how women have stood this — always — since the very first?" she said half to herself. "We must always wait — always be inactive." Her voice was heavy and monotonous. Where was the use of being shrill and exasperated with Fate? It was more unalterable than a cautious mother — and so much more immovable.

"I don't see how they have borne it," she repeated. He did not answer her at once. Then he said, "By obeying the first commandment — perhaps."

She brushed it away with a movement of the hand. Consolations of that sort were not what she wanted — and she had been reckless of commandments.

"By realizing," he finished calmly, "their place in a very big universe, and not letting the one personal trouble fill up all their vision."

It was an appeal to something which answered. And she was not small enough to whine over his severity, — a respect in which she was easier to deal with than most women. He laid his hand on her

head. "Hein, Anne, P'tite Chose!" he said kindly. Then he left her to think it over.

She had thought it over to so much purpose that when Cecily Thorne came out of her room a little later, her preconceptions of pastoral peace were not disturbed. The last thing she would have imagined was the fragment of human experience in the early dawn. Anne and her mother — a mother for a classic tragedy — were putting on their hats to go in to mass.

Cecily went with them. It was already understood that she was not of their faith. But Madame Carmel had lived long enough among heretics to tolerate them while awaiting their subsequent damnation.

It was raining when they came out from the church, — a rain that fell straight and fine from dark, charged clouds to the dark earth, splashing back from the stones in white drops. But in the east the clouds had not yet quite closed over and there was a light there, as of a pale sun shining through a curtain of thin silver, — very clear and very cold. There was not a breath of wind, even the leaves of the flowers only stirred with the falling drops. It was a rain that would last all day. And within half an hour the light had quite gone from the east, the whole sky was an even gray, and the rain came in a downpour, drifting off the roof in puffs of spray. The branches of the climbing roses whipped and rebounded against the windows now, and the purple and white of the lilacs

surged up and down. At intervals a yellow shine of lightning spread over the curtain of driving water.

The Curé was out. Madame Carmel had gone off also, in the presbytère buggy behind the big sorrel horse, which had apparently never in its life been groomed or clipped. She was to spend the whole day with Madame Tetrault, who was ill. Anne was busy in the kitchen with Amélie Latouche.

Cecily sat in front of the fire playing with the puppy for a while. She looked into the flames with wide-open, soft eyes. There was a world where ambition and restlessness were the measures of success and worth—but it was very far away from here. Here there was peace, as brooding as the gray clouds, and a quietness that fell on the mind, bringing up little new seedlings of thought, as the spring rain fell on the soil outside, to bring up the young grass and plants.

She stroked the puppy's silky hair with one hand, and it devoted itself in turn to washing each one of the fingers of the other hand, from palm to tip, with the minutest care. When she rubbed softly around the splint on the broken paw, it closed its eyes in drowsy bliss.

After a while she heard the knob of the side door turn with a good deal of rattling. She looked up. The door opened slowly, and a small girl of the most solid build compatible with movement stood there.

She saw a stranger and was rooted to the spot, unable to so much as get a finger to her mouth. This was terrible beyond any experience she had ever before suffered. She was by no means intuitive, but she divined at once a difference between the person there on the hearth and all the others to whom she was moderately accustomed. She even connected her vaguely with the strange man who had stood in the doorway of the tavern, just now, as she had passed with a very large and rusty umbrella serving as a background rather than as a protection. The horrible creature had called another man, an older one, to look at her, saying something she did not understand. She had stopped without knowing it. But at the laugh of the older man she had turned and fled, the umbrella close over her head, and only the edge of a skirt and two short, thick, bare legs showing from beneath it.

But here she was not able to get either forward or back, and then the thing she dreaded happened. The lady spoke to her. What did she want? She had not the glimmer of an idea what she wanted. She stared into mental vacancy, and her eyes were black and round, and her braids stuck out short and stiff. Did she wish to see the Curé? She was dumb. The lady in front of the fire put aside the puppy and rose up. Yvonne's terror reached the notch where movement was again possible. She backed out and shut the door. Cecily went and opened it. But Yvonne edged

still farther out into the garden. She had put down her umbrella and left it by the doorway, so she stood unprotected in the sheeting rain, amid the daffodils and hyacinths.

Cecily went then and reported it to Anne. "I seem to have frightened her so that she would rather be drowned than come near me." "It's Yvonne," Anne told her, and went out. She took the little girl up. Yvonne struggled with creditable strength, the surprising strength of small animals who use every one of their supple muscles in concert. But it made no impression upon Anne. She came into the house and shut the door. "This is Mademoiselle Thorne," she said, putting Yvonne down, "and she will not speak to you or look at you. You can play with your dog, or you can take that big umbrella and go home if you had rather. But you shall not stand in the rain and get all wet." Yvonne had backed away until the wall prevented her going any farther. Her bright black eyes never left Anne's face. "If you don't speak to her, and pay her no attention, she will be contented," Anne said to Cecily. The English, which had been rusty with disuse until Harnett had come, went glibly enough now—albeit with an occasional Gallicism. Miss Thorne's French was equally easy, and they changed from one to the other with as little trouble as though she herself, like the Carmels, had come from a city of a dual tongue.

She took the suggestion, and, leaving the fireplace, turned her attention markedly to the books. They filled three good shelves, and ranged from the Latin Testament, the "Journée du Chrétien," and "Le Combat Spirituel," to "Juvenal's Satires," a few modern novels, and a much dog-eared and falling-apart life of Abélard and Héloïse. The battered story of that love, which the intellect of the lovers has raised above all others of history, struck her as being a little out of place in the small library of a curé of a St. Hilaire. But the name across the first page was Madame Carmel's. Did the Curé's sister indulge herself in literature of the sort? she wondered—and was her mind soil in which the superb self-abandonment of the reputed niece of the Chanoine Fulbert would take root and bring forth fruit after its kind? Anne Carmel was apparently of an individuality which caused speculation—the result doubtless of her steady gray eyes and restraint of manner. A woman with inscrutable eyes and a repressed, self-contained manner might be simplicity itself and devoid of all complications and depth, but she would awaken conjecture.

Anne herself came back into the room.

The night before, after Miss Thorne had gone to bed, she had spoken to Jean. "Have you told her—about me?" she had asked.

"Assuredly not," he had answered.

"But she might dislike being here, if she knew," she had opposed.

It was not in any way humility. It was nearer being a defensive pride that objected to false colors. If her brother had given her the smallest encouragement, she would have gone to Cecily and have told her everything, and that baldly and crudely, with as little self-justification as possible. But he had failed to encourage her. And after all, he had suggested, what did they themselves know of Miss Thorne? "She must take us on trust, as we have taken her."

Anne, however, was not satisfied. She intended to find out Cecily's attitude on questions of the sort in general, if not in this specific case. The book that she found her reading gave an opening ready to hand. She went and stood by the window in front of her, and began to speak of the story. It appeared then that she had read it.

Miss Thorne was not inclined to throw in any pebble of liberal philosophy which might perhaps ripple the tranquil waters of this village girl's life. She parried Anne's questions with considerable adroitness, while escaping the condemnation that conventional morality required. "And you—what do you think?" she asked.

"I?" said Anne. "It is not of much importance. I think she was, not better than the Magdalen, perhaps, but braver—because she would not repent." The personal note was not to be mistaken. But Miss Thorne's dreamy eyes did not change as they looked into the

unsuspected depth. The vision of pastoral peace was gone in a ray of cold, hard light.

Even the village of St. Hilaire, the little presbytère of its priest, had not only its temptations, but perhaps its falls.

CHAPTER XI

THE flock of St. Hilaire was one prone, for the most part, to remain in the green pastures close to the fold. But it had its wandering sheep — Antoine, who had been in his youth the property of O'Hara. O'Hara had gone out to the new West in the seventies, had stayed a few years until the fact that he had fallen heir to his father's farm, and also that he was homesick, brought him back to the Lower Province and the sound of the Canadian bells. He had returned with a boy of four or five who was, he gave it out, an orphan Métis. But it was commonly believed that, though the child was certainly a half-breed, he was not altogether orphaned, that O'Hara himself was, in fact, his father. This, however, did not prevent the Irishman's marriage with a most respectable little habitant girl, by whom he had in due time a large family. Antoine was kept to grow up with the legitimate children, an arrangement never satisfactory since the days of the tragedy of the wilderness of Beer-sheba. Madame O'Hara registered objections directly upon the arrival of the first-born. O'Hara, however, did not consider himself bidden of

God to heed all the words of his wife, and the example of Abraham was one of which he had never heard. He refused to turn the small Métis adrift.

It might have been the better for the child, nevertheless, had he done so, since there resulted for him a bad life. Madame O'Hara was a woman who had done her share of field work. She had a temper of which even her Irish spouse stood in quaking fear. She could not force him to drive the stranger out, perhaps, but in all things else she had her way, and it was a cruel enough one. Antoine suffered. He was half starved and thoroughly beaten. The beatings were the scandal of the neighborhood, but Monsieur Biret, who was then the curé, had never seen fit to interfere. He was a brutal man himself, having no aim in life beyond forcing money out of his parishioners. That a half-breed should be tortured unjustly concerned him not at all. Madame O'Hara paid well and regularly.

So it went along until Monsieur Carmel came into the village. Monsieur Carmel was not at all keen to get money. He put an end to the abuse forthwith shortly and effectually. "This thing must stop," he told Madame O'Hara, when he found Antoine grovelling on the ground in the agony of a thrashing just ended. And she stopped it. Except in matters pertaining immediately to religion, a curé was not to her habitant mind to be paid much attention to. But this one was not merely a curé, he was a person to be obeyed.

Antoine was grateful, grateful like a little maltreated cur that lies at its rescuer's feet and cowers, and turns up imploring eyes. He never forgot. When O'Hara died he was fourteen years old, and he left the farm at once. The legitimate O'Haras had been sorry to see him go. They regarded him as their brother and called him so. He had been a good playmate, inventive and resourceful. They had no more marked objection to an Indian for a companion than had those forbears of theirs whose governor danced war dances with the savages, and who, for the most part, adopted the customs of the red men quite as often as imposed their own.

But Antoine left the farm and went out into the world, and thereafter troubled them very little. Now and then he returned to St. Hilaire. When he concerned himself about it at all, he acknowledged that as his home. For the rest he was *coureur de bois*, *voyageur*, guide, river man, hunter, sometimes in the maple sugar and sometimes in the lumber camps, on rafts or snowshoes often, in the hayfields or in the orchards rarely. When he appeared in St. Hilaire, if he had not been away as long as usual, he offered the explanation that he had been "*pa'la*," jerking his head vaguely north, south, east, or west. At other times he had been "*bien loin*," and waved his arm to indicate great distance. "*Bien loin*" might be a hundred leagues or a good deal more. Antoine was never sure. He reckoned his journeys by days; and as some days

he went at a dog trot for the whole time, and at others travelled a couple of hours all told, the measurements were not accurate. On the very rare occasions, when he became what was, for him, communicative, and deigned to open his beautiful, sinister lips to speak cut phrases, he volunteered the fact that he had been everywhere; to the great plains of the West where his own people, thanks to the 'rebel Riel, had now their own land; to the Gaspé peninsula where were the white fishing stations; to Cape Breton and Hudson Bay, across the border into the States, and also to the big cities, Montreal, Quebec, Ottawa, Winnipeg. It was possibly true, and quite as possibly not. For he never went into details upon which he could be tripped up. Nevertheless, he was looked upon with admiration by the people of St. Hilaire, who themselves did not go in for indiscriminate and futile travelling, who stayed on their farms and in their shops, and attended to matters directly at hand. They had, in this century, no need to be kept down by the old decrees, which forbade their scattering and adventurous antecedents to run the woods. If one of them nowadays chanced to have been so far as the River or a few leagues into the bush, he had a right to look upon himself as bold above the ordinary.

It was natural, therefore, that when Antoine came back to the parish he should be a person of interest. And he was now newly returned. It was for the purpose of attending to his religious duties. Sooner or

later he could always be counted upon to come in from the great beyond to confess himself to Monsieur Carmel. Monsieur Biret was accountable for that. He had been hated and dreaded by the half-breed, but he had, in spite of that, burned his own fanaticism and superstition into a mind that took the red-hot brand easily, with a predilection for the horrible equal to that of those Hurons for whom it had been, of old, necessary to order holy pictures of hell tortures more than commonly atrocious in suggestion.

So the same day that the three strangers had arrived, Antoine had come home from "pa'la" with intent to confess. It was almost a year since he had done so, and to that he ascribed several pieces of bad luck which had befallen him, as well as one scare from which he had not recovered yet, — the appearance of the ghost of a man, a white man, whom he had known in a lumbering camp that winter. The man had gambled with him and lost the whole of his winter's earnings. Subsequently he had killed himself. Antoine had not known of that until he had happened to meet another friend who had told him. And the same night the ghost had walked around and around him through the trees. Antoine preferred confession and heavy penance to anything of that unpleasant and intangible sort. And that was why he had come back to get the matter off his mind.

At the tavern he had met a stranger who had wanted

forthwith to make a picture of him. Antoine was sufficiently obliging when he was not morose. At the time Mathew Thorne proposed the sketch he was in a good humor. He did not object to keeping still. He could do that for a day at a stretch, and hardly move a muscle, if the mood was on him. Also, the promise of pay was tempting. The American himself, with his pointed yellow beard and white hands, he did not like overmuch; he talked in a suspicious way about things Antoine did not understand and consequently mistrusted. "The sinful fascination of a beautiful devil is yours," he had said, considering the Métis' face; and Antoine, whose English was limited in the extreme, had comprehended only the satanic allusion, and had scowled. Nevertheless, he had promised to come on the following day.

He spent the evening at the tavern, and then departed to pass the night at the cabin of Marcelin Séailles, in the woods. Marcelin, who lived with his sister, was very old, and remembered days that had been better for the ancestors of Antoine's mother than these present ones. He had had plenty of Indian friends himself, and could mumble gory stories that the half-breed liked to listen to. Antoine had listened to them, then gone off to sleep on the floor, and in the morning he had left the cabin and the clearing and taken his way down through the forest path to the village. It was raining, but he did not mind that. He

went to the tavern and found Thorne there, and settled himself for the picture. It progressed to the satisfaction of every one in the room, and there were many, since out-of-door work was impossible.

Thorne was interested in the type of head in front of him, and in the sketch, and for a while he paid small attention to the comments, and less to the patois chatter around him. But presently he caught the name of Anne Carmel. And he listened then. It was not spoken with respect, rather with a tone the meaning of which is the same in all languages. So it was this, then, that accounted for a degree of poise and sophistication in the Curé's sister which had seemed inexplicable in a girl of a backwoods village. That Anne's earlier girlhood had been spent in a large city had not even made it clear to him. The tone of the villagers did.

They left the subject almost immediately, however, and he got no detailed information until well on into the afternoon, when the sketch was finished. Antoine had taken his departure, and he himself was sitting on the porch, smoking. A habitant more garrulous than the others joined him, and Thorne led the subject around to where he wanted it. The habitant was nothing loath. He gave Anne's story, with embellishments. When he went he left Thorne with the understanding that the Curé's handsome sister had had more lovers than only the English hunter. Thorne was interested. The prospect of staying idle around St. Hilaire for the

several days during which his father would be pottering with plants and birds had not presented any attractions to him before. Now it did. One might put in one's time a good deal worse than with an uncommonly effective and intelligent girl who was not averse to man's society.

He was not sure, however, that he fancied Cecily's proximity to the girl. He was of those males who are virtuously insistent upon the virtue of all who may approach their own women folk—excepting only themselves. He had thoughts of getting Cecily away from the contamination. But he reconsidered it. To do it he would have to give his reasons. And that would mean the defeat of his own ends, which were, to be frequently at the priest's house. And Cecily, after all, was a woman of three and twenty, whose head was filled with harmonies, and whose heart had room for nothing but restless ambition. She was entirely able to take care of herself. Upon the whole, he would keep his information to himself, and act upon it. To this latter end he watched the presbytère gate narrowly. He saw Monsieur Carmel come out and go into a house farther down the street. Madame Carmel, he already knew, was away. If Cecily could be disposed of, the coast would be clear. And his father came to his aid in this. "It is clearing," he said. "I am going to get your cousin for a walk. Will you come?"

Mathew Thorne leaned forward and flicked the ashes of his cigar over the porch rail. Then he shook his head indolently. It was too muddy, he averred. "I will stay here and improve my opportunities of learning village life." His father went without him, and presently he and Cecily disappeared down the road together.

Thorne gave them time to get well off. Then he threw away the end of his cigar and went over to the presbytère.

The habitant who had imparted the information concerning Anne was leaning over a fence talking with the wife of a neighbor, who was feeding her chickens. He caught sight of Thorne. "Look!" he called attention. "There will be a Yankee now, as well. The Curé is too trustful. She is alone."

The sky was brightening in the west, and its golden shine was reflected in the puddles of water, on the flat stones of the sidewalk, and on the wet gravel of the garden path. Thorne took note of the values in yellow produced by that and by the beds of jonquils and daffodils. Then he went up the steps.

Anne heard his knock, a running tapping of the finger ends, unpleasantly suggestive of a signal. She went to the door and opened it. She met Thorne's eyes, and she guessed at once that he had heard the gossip and why he had come. Her face and neck colored with a deep, painful crimson, and then turned

as painful a white. But she could not turn him away. "My brother is not here," she attempted it; "he has gone to a neighbor's."

Thorne raised his eyebrows with a look of comprehension. "I did not come to see your brother," he said. She put the door wider then, and let him go in. He closed it behind them and followed her into the sitting room.

It was not more than a quarter of an hour before he came out again, and went down the path to the gate, his own face flushed and annoyed. There was only one person in St. Hilaire, himself included, whom he was not in the mood to despise; and that was Anne Carmel.

As for Anne, she stood in the middle of the room, where she had sprung to her feet, still holding behind her the hand he had taken. Her wide eyes did not see the window in front of them, with its vista of young green and of spring flowers, but only her own punishment, coming slowly and steadily upon her, the inevitable punishment which she knew now, for the first time, she could not escape—her degradation before herself.

Thorne did not go back to the presbytère that evening. His father went, but he himself stayed on at the tavern. Antoine was there and in an almost communicative humor. The habitants hung on his few words. And among the men was Paul Tetrault. Paul had been drinking of late rather

heavily. He had done so to-night. Several of the others were in the same plight. It had taken treating to get speech from Antoine, and the host's business had thriven.

The habitant who had talked to Thorne in the afternoon had had his too easy tongue moved to still further loquacity by white whiskey, and it was not long before he had got back to his subject of earlier in the day — Anne Carmel. He began to enlarge upon it, with leers of understanding at Thorne. Tetrault had had to hear a good deal of the same sort in the past half-year, but as yet nothing so abominable as this. He stood it in silence for a few moments, then he turned to the man. "Stop that," he said. "It is a lie, and you know it is." The man laughed tipsily, close into the pink and white face with its plump cheeks. Antoine watched, making no offer to interfere as yet, merely moving to a vantage point, leaning against the bar and crossing his legs easily. But his look was not pleasant. Thorne saw that, and saw, moreover, that unless the slanderer could be stopped there would be trouble.

The habitant, with his chin still pushed up under young Tetrault's nose, attempted another slur. Thorne caught him by the shoulder and jerked him away, throwing him half across the room. Antoine took note of the fact that the white hands he had despised were creditably strong. The man was too drunk, however, to be warned. He turned on Thorne himself

angrily, with a meaning wink. "Yes," he said, "you went over to the presbytère as soon as I told you — when they were all away — the others. You are one of her friends, too, perhaps."

Thorne's doubled fist hit him full on the mouth, and he went down in a heap. But whether or not the sympathies of the others were with him, at least they were altogether against American interference, upon purely racial and religious grounds. They closed on Thorne, and Tetrault came to his help. Antoine still waited, leaning impassively against the bar.

There were five habitants as against the stranger and Tetrault. And the latter was of small use, hitting wildly, windmill fashion, with swinging arms. Thorne was down. The five were atop of him, yelling and snarling and cursing with noisy rage. They were unarmed, but they were sinewy peasants and would make short work of the man. And Thorne had championed some one belonging to Monsieur Carmel. That was his only merit in Antoine's eyes, the only reason for going to the rescue. The half-breed went, whipping out the knife he carried after the fashion of the earliest voyageurs.

Tetrault was against the wall, Thorne was underneath and struggling hard, and the rest were surging up and down, back and forth. Antoine was upon them, his teeth shut and his eyes gleaming.

Jean Carmel saw it all as he came into the doorway,



"The Curé stepped in front of Thorne and lifted his crucifix."

hurrying from the presbytère with the boy who had run to get him. They were fighting like a pack of sledge dogs, as aimlessly, and confusedly, and indiscriminately. He crossed over and took hold of Antoine, wrenching the knife from him with a single twist. Then he caught one man after another, dragged him back, lifted him, and flung him away.

Thorne got to his feet, and Tetrault slunk off into a corner. The villagers started at Thorne again on an impulse. One of them was cut, and he had an indistinct notion that the American had somehow done it. The Curé stepped in front of Thorne and lifted his crucifix. The other hand held the knife gleaming against the cassock. They fell back.

Jean Carmel turned to Thorne. "What is the trouble?" he asked, curt for breathlessness. He looked even larger and more powerful than he was, in the light from the one dull lamp, and the knife and the crucifix made a picturesque enough contrast. The men cowered behind him, and Antoine stood impassive and inscrutable again.

Thorne had his code. He adhered to it. "It was a quarrel," he said, "a quarrel between myself and that man," — he pointed to the garrulous habitant who was recovering himself from having been pitched half over the table, — "and it did not in any way concern the rest of them." The Curé accepted it that Thorne did not care to go into further particulars.

But Tetrault's sensibilities were not so fine. He was excited, worked up to the point of hysteria, and filled with an admiration of the American which he wanted to proclaim. "I will tell you, mon père," he put in. And disregarding Thorne's quick look of warning, he told. Jean Carmel stood and listened, and his face set into drawn lines. He gave back the knife to Antoine without so much as an admonition. Then he turned to Thorne again. "Thank you," he said, and held out his hand. Thorne took it with as much grace as a conscience by no means entirely satisfied would allow him to muster up.

CHAPTER XII

MADAME CARMEL was baking her own bread in the stone oven at the rear of the house. It was a duty never left to Amélie Latouche, and madame adhered to the custom of the girlhood she had spent on a St. Lawrence farm, preferring the stone oven to any iron one.

Anne was at the Gerard cottage. Madame Gerard had been taken ill in the night, the eldest daughter had something very like pneumonia, and the grandmother was in need of help. It was her contention that education was to blame directly for all the ills. The child had caught her cold at school, and Marie Louise's failing health was due, she took it, to working from daylight until after dark, and then studying in the evening so that she often spelled words at night in her sleep. The grandmother had protested, but all in vain; and now that her predictions of evil were justified she was not altogether sorry, but she was put to it and needed help. Monsieur Carmel had offered to send Anne, and the suggestion had been accepted with a sudden willingness to overlook, under the circumstances, sins toward which she was not as a general thing lenient.

Marie Louise, out of innate sweetness of disposition as well as gratitude to Monsieur Carmel, had never been severe upon Anne and had tried to defend her. The grandmother, however, was of sterner stuff and of the unforgivingness which age shares with hard youth.

Anne had accepted the situation without irony when her brother had told her. She asked nothing of the parish, but she was willing to be of use. And where there were children she was especially glad to go. It was only with children who understood nothing, and Jean, who understood everything, that she could feel herself like any other woman, and not some different and curious manner of creature to be kept away from and watched covertly and discussed. So she had gone over to the cottage early in the morning.

As for Jean Carmel, he was at leisure for the first time in the thirty-six hours since Cecily Thorne had been in St. Hilaire. He came out from the church, into the garden by the side gate, and up to where she sat upon the porch. And presently Madame Carmel, turning away from the oven, caught sight of them going up the road together. She watched them from under the wide brim of her hat, and she was not pleased. Since the first she had looked with considerable disfavor upon having Miss Thorne in the presbytère. Her nature was one to take kindly to the contention of those prophets, saints, and doctors who have held that, to the priest of God, women

must stand His one created unclean thing. And she had frequently, in the earlier days of his orders, impressed it upon Jean that they were, for such as he, a lure to perdition. He had wearied of it in the end and had protested with some disgust. "After all, mother, they are human beings, too, I suppose," he had said, "and I really cannot be always troubling to remind myself that they are women."

Apparently he was not troubling to remind himself now that Miss Thorne was a woman, since, in the face of all the village, he was going off with her alone. And the two nights before he had talked to her with no more reserve than he had used toward Mathew and the elder Thorne.

Madame Carmel went into the house annoyed. It was surely enough to have one's daughter the scorn of the parish, but that the Curé, whom one had the proud right to call one's son, should also give occasion for scandal, was beyond the bounds of patience. Patience, she knew, would have to be exercised, however, and discretion. She stood in a good deal of awe of Jean, and was not anxious to remonstrate with him and meet his astonished displeasure at evil constructions.

And he, without the least idea that he might be incurring such, kept on out the road. "We will go to see Marcelin Séailles," he said to Cecily Thorne. "He has a little cabin in a clearing two miles from here, and he is the oldest man in many parishes — no one

knows just how old—but he talks of the bad times of the Loyalist settlers.”

Anne had already told her of Marcelin, and that he was not to be persuaded from the belief that the first Napoleon still lived, and that Canada was merely leased to the British for ninety-nine years. “The Curé before Jean, Monsieur Biret, gave him that information,” Anne had explained. “They are not all so honest as Jean—the priests, and they, most of them, will do all they can to keep the habitants French and ignorant.”

Cecily spoke of it now. “Anne is not given to making allowances.” He defended his predecessor. “Marcelin has been almost stone deaf for uncounted years. He may have misunderstood.”

They went down the road that led to the river. There were fields on either side. A group of children hung over the stone wall of one of them, watching a farmer and his wife ploughing with a pair of oxen. They saw the Curé coming, and scrambled down. There were five of them, and they all stood waiting, staring unabashed at the American *dame* who wore no hat on her head—all save Yvonne, who had been enjoying the prestige of previous acquaintance with the presbytère guest; but in no wise emboldened by that now, had shrunk off against the wall, and stood there, hanging her head and twisting a bare toe into the soil.

The Curé stopped and spoke to them. They smiled up into his face. The boys' hats were in their hands, and one of them offered him a bunch of meadow-sweet. A little girl had edged close, and was holding to a fold of the cassock. "We will give the flowers to the demoiselle, will we not?" suggested Monsieur Carmel, and held them out to Cecily.

It was a day for summer rather than for spring. The sky was soft blue, drifting with misty clouds. There was a warm, wet smell from the earth. The meadows were yellow with long-stemmed dandelions that billowed in the southwest breeze. They went through a gap in a fence where the bars of a gate were rotting away, and crossed a field. A fawn-colored cow was cropping the grass and violets, wrinkling her white nose greedily. She raised her head with a contemplative look in her velvety eyes. Then she went on eating again, undisturbed.

They came out upon another road, hard and white after the rain, running between a row of fringing red maples on the one side, and of high poplars with their delicate pin-point tracery upon the other. A woman stood at the back of a cottage, feeding some ducks and geese that waddled up from a puddle. She stooped awkwardly, but her red skirt, patched with big pieces of newer stuff, made a good touch of color against the brown of the earth. Her back was turned. Jean Carmel motioned toward her. "There is a heroine,"

he said ; "not a great one, perhaps, but one for a little village. It is Thérèse Labiscaye." And he went on to tell her story as they walked.

There had been a time, seven or eight years before, when Thérèse had had a lover, a young workingman, the blacksmith's assistant. She had had also, unfortunately, an old and infirm mother, needing comforts, and a sister married well to a rich man—as riches were counted by the farmers—and living several parishes away on the St. Lawrence. The sister, having risen from nothing to be a person of importance, had become filled with pride, which was outraged at the prospect of a blacksmith's journalier for a brother-in-law. And Thérèse had been given to understand, without pity, that her choice must lie between letting the lover go, or having withdrawn the liberal fifteen dollars a month provided by the sister for the old mother's ease. "The mother wanted the comforts, and the blacksmith's boy could not have given them to her," he explained. "Thérèse obeyed her sister, and the journalier eventually married some one else. It must be some comfort to her to know that they are not happy together. She is good and unselfish, but she has her human points, I suppose. So you see we can watch all the complications of more civilized life here in the hills on a scale that is smaller, perhaps, as to money and ambitions, but quite as large as to passions and suffering." Cecily made no comment. She was wondering

less about the complications of Thérèse Labiscaye's affairs than about those of Anne Carmel.

"She cared for him very much," he said directly, "and it has aged her. She is not yet thirty. There are numbers of such little tragedies among us here—a good many, of course, of which nobody but the priest ever hears." Cecily looked back. Thérèse had turned and seen them. She was watching them, her eyes shaded by her hand.

"Sometimes," said Jean Carmel, "I have thought that perhaps she did not do what was fundamentally right after all, in considering the superfluous comforts of some one whose life was almost done. In a way it was breaking the law of God, without which other laws could hardly be. But then," he stopped and snapped off a thick branch that had grown across the path at the height of Cecily's head, "but then, the laws of God do not seem to be democratic. There is one set for the lower order of intelligences, and one for a higher. To love and raise young is for the lower. The mere beasts can follow that. It takes something finer to be able to see a duty and follow it to the bitter end—if the end of duty can ever be really bitter."

In Séailles' cabin the old pair made the Curé welcome with much toothless jargon which he appeared to understand, but which was unintelligible to Cecily. "Marcelin was once, they tell me," Monsieur Carmel

said, "as large a man and as strong as I am." And she looked at him now, shrunken and shrivelled and unsteady, with unpleasant eyes and foolishly moving mouth, come to the old age of those who live hard lives. She could not help imagining a picture of Jean Carmel arrived at something of the sort. And it was depressing. Moreover, the one-room cabin, once seen, was not attractive to remain in. Neither it nor its occupants were clean, and Marcelin's worsted toque had a look and odor of greasy decay which made it anything but pleasant to have the tassel flicked in one's face as he pushed close in his efforts to hear. She was glad to get away.

They went back by another path, and came out through a stile on to a grassy hillside that sloped down to the river, glistening blue between the trunks of aspens and birches. To the right there was a grove of firs. The moss and turf gave under their feet, the dandelions were rippling gold, and the small field violets, that could hardly be seen, made their color felt in a faint purple haze. A big oak was in the midst of the meadow. The dead leaves of the year before were still strewed around it, and the new ones were only just coming fairly out. The sunshine fell through them on the pale hair that seemed to bend Cecily Thorne's head forward a little with its weight. Monsieur Carmel saw it as he stood near her.

They were in sight of the village, in sound of

occasional calling voices, and he was not minded to go back to the presbytère at once. Out-of-doors was always to be preferred to the house. He had the morning to himself, and he was still not troubling to remember that he was with a woman. He stretched himself out on the grass, and the woman of whose sex he was so frankly unheeding kept back a smile at the contrast between the cassock and the attitude—not exactly what one was accustomed to conceiving as clerical, but suggestive certainly of strength in repose, a strength which might have accomplished in some other place a few of the things that cry aloud for the quality—and are frequently left unanswered. A man of a different sort would have served to say mass, to teach young Madame Gerard reading and writing, and to hear the pathetic little life histories of such as Thérèse Labiscaye. It was much what he himself had thought two days before, as he had walked back from the Lavissee farm in the late afternoon.

Two tiny butterflies, one white and one the blue of the hazy sky, were flickering about over the dandelions and violets. She watched them absently, bending forward, with her chin on her hand. And he looked off into the deep shadows among the trunks of the fir grove. Now and then, as they talked, he turned his head and met her eyes. They were tawny eyes, with a somewhat appealing look of gentleness. He had noticed it already, and also that it belied the entire self-

confidence of her nature, which was fully as absolute as Anne's own, if more modified by the habits of another manner of life. Anne's girlhood had been spent for the best part in the forests; Cecily Thorne's in the great city where she had been born.

Madame Carmel had set forth her judgment of Cecily that same morning. "She is as slender and frail to look at as one of the jonquils in your garden — yet she can endure as much as the two men, they tell me. And for all her soft eyes and drooping head and slow voice, she knows what she wants, and will have it, too."

Her son had answered from his own observations that he was not so certain she would have it. "I should say that she would let it go without much effort, and do almost as well with something else. She must have seen too many sides of life to think that any one is worth more than all the others."

He thought of it now, and speculated upon what her life had been and was. She had not told them much that was altogether personal. He knew that she had neither father nor mother, and had her own livelihood to gain by her singing. Beyond that she had not gone into detail. She had sung for Anne, but he himself had not heard her.

Two men came toward the field through the fir groves. He saw them while they were still too far away to recognize, and pointed them out.

A robin, in a thorn bush close to the oaks, began to

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trill loudly. The two men came nearer. They were Antoine à O'Hara and Cecily's cousin. Until they were within fifty feet, passing down to the river, they did not see the others under the big tree. Then Thorne looked up, hesitated perceptibly, raised his cap, spoke, and kept on.

The song of the robin stopped abruptly. It was frightened and, dropping to the grass, hopped away. In the sudden silence Thorne's voice came distinctly, thrown out from under the roof of thick green and the aisles of trunks. He was making to Antoine a comment which brought a look in no wise gentle into Cecily's eyes. Jean Carmel stiffened visibly in every limb. But except for that he gave no sign. Not the shadow of a change came over his face. Yet if he had not troubled to remind himself that he was with a woman, Thorne, at least, — judging after his kind, — had most effectually done it. He reached out for a dead leaf, weather-worn to the lacework of the veins, and twirled it between his fingers.

"That beautiful Antoine, there, is a dangerous creature," he said imperturbably. "My influence over him does not extend much beyond the bounds of the parish, and not always to there. Last night, for instance. He might have done some more serious damage with his knife. But fortunately there was only one severe cut. You can never tell when the sleeping savage will rouse itself in the breed."

She remembered Mathew Thorne's description of the Curé, standing in the midst of the ill-lighted tavern room, the men he had tossed about with such small apparent effort slinking away from him, the crucifix lifted in one hand and the knife he had wrenched from the Métis' sinewy grasp gleaming in the other.

He was a man whom men respected — was he also, she wondered as to it now for the first time, a man whom women loved? There were many little tragedies here in this parish among the hills, he had said, and many of which no one but the priest ever knew.

Had any woman, kneeling in the cold, quiet aisles of the little stone church, ever pressed together, as if in prayer, fingers that in her thoughts were touching the brown hair of the head bent before the altar? Had it ever seemed to one of them, whispering in the confessional, that the very force of her longing must do away with the barrier between her and the dark form so near that the humanity of it made things of the spirit impossible, made her whole being grope, not for support of the Everlasting Arms, but for the mere mortal ones that could hold her close and give her the rest here for which she would forego without a regret all of eternity's cold peace? And had the fingers ever been laid on the brown hair, or the barrier ever given way?

She would have had the answer if she could have known his thoughts, as he sat late that night in front

of the big chimney place, alone, leaning forward, with his elbows on his knees and a closed book in his hands, looking into the hot coals which had kept the shape of the branches to the last, glowing and pulsing to the heart, falling apart now without a sound, and turning slowly ashen and gray.

It was more than five years since any woman had come into Jean Carmel's life, even upon the mere neutral territory of the things of the intellect where Cecily Thorne stood to-day. But there had been a time before that, which he had small satisfaction in recalling. He was the son of men and women who for generations—since the Conquest at any rate—had observed the church's precepts of morality sufficiently well, but who had married early, following the policy which has caused the doubling of their race once in every third of a century. Through much of his manhood, too, he had lived away from centres of civilization, from cities, which may have their enticements and opportunities, but have also their counterbalancing distractions and interests, their many appeals to the intellectual, ambitious, and striving side of a man's nature. By his calling itself he was led into the way of much temptation, inevitably, to a far greater extent than most men, and yet with far fewer means of withdrawal. And he was, moreover, in no wise oblivious to existing conditions within the hierarchy, patent to almost the least keen, most un-

suspecting observer, in some of the back country parishes, though less obvious in the more populous ones. Priest's farms were institutions whose purposes he had no choice but to understand. So the breaking of his vows was not only all but forced on him by the past and present, but facilitated, too, for any future that might result. And, nevertheless, he had not broken them.

It was only the first of the victories over himself that had cost him any lasting pain. In the year of freedom before he had taken his parish at St. Hilaire, or any other, he had turned aside from the routes of shrines, cathedrals, and holy spots, into Picardie, drawn there by the interest which the story of Marguerite de Roberval had always held for him, and by the traditions that it was the starting-place of the family of Carmel. He had been a guest on a farm belonging to the brother of a priest he knew well at home. The man had had a daughter, and the parting from her at the end of a short fortnight had been the one bitter ordeal of Jean Carmel's life. He had not been blameless there, he had met her more than halfway. Yet he had never been able to feel any shame for that brief idyl among the willow lanes of Picardie, and there had been much more of good than of evil in what he had felt. He had loved her.

But he had not loved the wife of Tetrault's eldest son, though she had left no device untried to pull him down to her level, which was a low one.

That struggle had been short and quickly over, when at the last she had brought it on. She had never forgiven him for conquering himself and her. Her dangerous love had turned to a hatred of which she still made little secret.

And as for Lavissee's child — when he had seen her eyes close at the last, it had been with only the regret which one must of necessity feel over the sad ending of a life for the hopelessness of which one has been unwillingly responsible. He did not wish that the eyes might shine again with the light he had seen in them too often when she had made pretexts to find him alone in the sacristy or the church, or even in the woods. He had never helped her to the planned meetings, and he had not realized that they were such until the day when she had forced the knowledge on him in despairing passion. Then he had put a stop to them, for once and all, as kindly as he could. She had not made it easy for him. It had been his saving, perhaps, that she was more innocent than the other woman, — without a wife's recklessness. He had watched the agony of a breaking heart, and he did not care to go through anything of the sort again.

She had not died, after so many intervening years, for love of him — merely still loving him, which left him no just cause for self-reproach. Yet he knew that he had been in a large measure at fault, by reason precisely of an obliviousness almost culpable.

He would have been glad to have had none of all this to remember as he sat, bending forward, his brows drawn together, looking into the fire which had become nearly ashes. So far as the recurrence of such episodes was concerned, the fires of that period of his youth were practically ashes now, too, he believed. Five years ago the suggestion behind Thorne's comment to Antoine might have had truth in it. It had not, at present, and never would have again. For Cecily Thorne, coming into his life during a bare three days and going back again to totally different conditions, there was none of that which he had felt for the others. She represented to him to a certain extent the things he had wished for on the afternoon he had envied the farm laborer's contented dulness. That was all. When she should be gone, he might possibly wish again for those — but not for herself.

He passed his hand across his forehead slowly, stood up and laid his book on the table. Then he went for the mattress and laid it down in front of the hearth. It was not long before he had blown out the candle and was asleep, with Pilote curled on the rug at his feet.

In the morning he went out into the garden on his way to church for the seven o'clock mass and a wedding in exceedingly humble life. For the first time he heard Cecily Thorne singing. He stood, trowel in hand, listening. She was singing to herself as she

moved around in her room, it seemed. She had told him that she did it as others talked to themselves, that it was the expression of her thoughts when she was alone. The voice was mellow and low pitched. He could not catch the words, because of the trilling of a bird in one of the maples. But they seemed to echo somewhere back into his memory. The song was still in his ears as he crossed the garden and went out through the side gate into the churchyard. To what thoughts had she been giving expression this time, he wondered.

Four people of interest to the entire parish went out of St. Hilaire a little later in the morning. One of them was Antoine à O'Hara, following the same impulse that sends the bear lumbering off through the forest, the wolf swinging away across the flat, the buffalo wandering over the prairies. The three others were the two Thornes and Cecily, who had walked down the highroad which led to the railway, the charette carrying their bags bumping along a few hundred yards in advance. All the village had been out to see the departure, even to Yvonne, who hid behind a corner of a fence with her head hanging and her small tongue thrust into her cheek, though there was no one to see her.

Anne had stood with her brother by the gate, then she had gone up with him to the beds of early flowers and watched him working with some pansy seedlings.

"I told Miss Thorne about myself," she said directly.

"Yes," he queried, "why?"

"Because I had reason to know that her cousin had heard. I was sure he would tell her—and I wanted her to have the truth, at least." On the whole he approved. "She will not be back again," Anne went on.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "the stillness of our hills is too deep for her, and the air from hundreds of miles of timber and thousands of the Barrens and the Unknown is too rare. She was born to a city."

"And she is to be married," Anne added. "Did she tell you of it?"

He shook his head. "No," he said absently. He was thinking—not of Cecily Thorne but of himself.

CHAPTER XIII

MONSIEUR CARMEL had a class of little boys whom he was preparing for their first communion. He did his best to inculcate some even slightly intelligent idea of the mysteries and meanings of the faith, but it was wearing and, at times, seemingly profitless work. Now and then he gave them a recess, taking into consideration not only their souls, but also their restless, wriggling bodies, with heads that turned and hands that strayed, and feet that crossed and uncrossed and swung and sometimes kicked.

Just at present it had occurred to him as rather a pity to keep them within doors on so fine an early summer afternoon, when their minds were visibly wandering far afield anyway. So he finished his little discourse as quickly as he could. Then he proposed a walk. Would they like to go? Ah! *voui, mon père*, they would like to go. Then let them wait a few moments until he should return. It was, "*Bien, mon père*," in chorus, and he went out of the room. The sound of many voices, raised and freed from restraint, followed him, also that of scuffling. It subsided abruptly when he came back carrying a big wooden bowl full

of squares of bread and pieces of maple sugar. They strained up their chins eagerly. "That is for us others, M'sieu' le Curé?" they asked. It appeared that it was, and M'sieu' le Curé distributed it. But it was not to be eaten now. It was to be put in pockets and saved. There were a few furtive licks at the sugar, but it went into the pockets almost immediately. The boy who was disobedient might be sent home and not allowed to go for the walk, which would be not only a deprivation but a disgrace.

On the street as they formed into line, the post-mistress came across, bringing two letters for Monsieur Carmel. The biweekly mail was just in. One envelope was white and typewritten as to address, the other was gray-blue, and the superscription was feminine. They were from his grandfather and Cecily Thorne. He knew it without opening them, and put them into his pocket. Then he marshalled the boys and started, two by two, himself holding the hand of the best-conduct boy—for the time being also the most proud. The boys began to whistle. It was an accomplishment in which they did not excel, but which they had picked up from a comrade who had "gone up into the States" with his parents, and returned. The notes were of the breathy quality, usually feminine. The Curé asked them the name of the song. The plus sage, whose hand he held, unpuckered his lips momentarily and told him. It was "Appel Blow-

soms," an American song. Etienne Coppée's father played it on the fiddle.

They went on for a little while, crossing a pasture and going through a fir grove into a meadow, in the centre of which grew a big oak. Monsieur took his place under the tree. It was the first time he had been back here since the day he had come with Cecily. There were still some few violets, and the wild azalea was in clumps of purple-pink. The gold of the buttercups was coming to replace that of the dandelions, and the fluffy sweetness of the wild cherry the graceful sprays of the moose berry. The woods themselves were a sunny thicket of green, sombre and light, with the slender birches glistening, and the cherry bark burnished red. The leafage had not its full denseness yet, but it was much thicker than it had been three weeks before.

The boys had scattered at once and the Curé took the letters from his pocket. His grandfather's he opened first. Lawrence Dollard was a Canadian who had emigrated to the States, following the way of some two-thirds of his people. He had prospered exceedingly in Massachusetts, and was the owner of considerable manufacturing interests. Once a year he wrote to his grandson with the utmost regularity and persistency—traits which had helped him to his success. The letter was always short and friendly, containing precisely the same thing,—the assurance

that Jean was too good for the fate to which the priesthood condemned him, that he should take his place as a man in a world of men. Dollard had fallen away from the church of his youth, and been touched with liberal and heretical views. But he believed in a Personal Providence, and was of the opinion that Jean was defeating its ends in being a priest. He was eighty years old, and had lived in the States forty years, long enough to have imbibed the commercial and progressive spirit. With faith in the efficacy of dropping water he regularly went over the case, and invariably offered his favorite grandson a worldly position by no means to be despised, at any time that the priesthood should be abandoned. Jean Carmel knew the arguments and the offer of old. They made no impression upon him. He put the letter back in its envelope and opened the gray-blue one.

Cecily had written at some length. When she had left St. Hilaire, he had suggested to her that she might have, from time to time, inclination and leisure to remember a humble curé de village, who had few interests connecting him with the stirring, active world outside the reclusion of the church.

He read what she had to say of her life in the city where the wealth and effort and success of a great nation converged. Then he leaned back against the tree, looking down to where the sunshine glinted on the river ripples, thinking desultorily.

He was recalled to the thing at hand. Two boys had come running toward him and fallen at his feet, grappling, fighting, and kicking. He stopped them. The boy who was uppermost hesitated, the one who was down waited with his fist lifted.

“But I say unto you,” quoted Jean Carmel, steadily, “that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.”

It was not that they gave much heed to these echoing notes of that first sonorous trumpet challenge of Peace, pealed from the mountain side of Galilee. It was the Curé's eye that held them. They moved and drew apart, but with reluctance. “It is not without a cause, mon père,” and he listened to the story of the squabble, the theft of a piece of maple sugar from a pocket, with criminations and recriminations, accusations and denials, that waxed heated and noisy again. He heard it all through with patience and attention; then followed out the policy he had always kept to with his flock, a policy they had not hitherto been acquainted with, even theoretically, and which they by no means understood. He put the accused upon his honor. Etienne must take thought of all the consequences—and he showed them to him, moral and material—then he must speak the truth. There was a pause. Batiste's breath was suspended. The Curé watched them both.

“I did not take it,” repeated Etienne.

Batiste saw his sugar gone, himself reduced to dry bread. "Liar!" he denounced, "liar! Ah! m'sieu', make him show you his pockets, the coup-choux," he implored.

But Jean Carmel's way was otherwise. "He will do as his conscience tells him to. If he has some reason for not wishing to prove his words—it is for him to decide. And you must eat your dry bread, my son. Dry bread with a good conscience is sweeter than maple sugar with an uneasy one."

Batiste did not in the least subscribe to any such abstruse code of ethics. He turned sharply away, hot with the sense of injustice. He was absolutely sure that Etienne had the sugar. So, for that matter, was the Curé. Etienne lingered. "I will give him my own piece," he ventured, without any especial enthusiasm however.

The Curé was not affected by this movement of uncalled-for generosity. "There is no reason why you should do that," he said, "if you have not taken his. You must do what you know to be right. I have no need to tell you what that is."

Etienne waited a little longer. Then he also turned and walked away slowly.

The eventual outcome of it was that the piece of maple sugar was given back and that no one was deprived when all the boys sat down upon the grass, and, regardless of black gnats and mosquitoes, ate

their shares, while Monsieur Carmel told them the story of the martyrdom of Jean Brébœuf.

It was a signal triumph of virtue and principles, but a line from his grandfather's letter came back to Jean Carmel as he sat and watched the boys go off again to hunt for columbine by the river shore. "Leave it to some one who is not fitted for larger things to nurse the consciences of women and children."

He went back into the village in the midst of his class of barefoot, ragged boys. Two of them held his hands now, swinging his arms as they almost ran beside him in their efforts to keep up with his steps. One of them was the good-conduct member, the other the sinner over whose repentance there was much joy—Etienne. He was conscious that the sense of virtue was in reality sweeter than maple sugar, and was perfectly willing to talk about his own righteousness, having as yet by no means reached the abstraction of desiring no reward of men. He called attention several times to his peculiar meritoriousness, admiring the beauty of his act of restitution almost impartially. Now, as the Curé stopped in front of the presbytère and the other boys raised their hats, he made mention of it again, pulling at the large hand he held in both his own. "I did well, did I not, mon père,—even when he called me liar and coup-choux? The Good God will love me?"

It is fortunate, perhaps, that for most of us the satisfaction of repentance effaces the very repentance itself, that we are generally much more pleased with ourselves for regretting a sin than we are grieved by the regret. The Curé knew the state of mind and soul of his young parishioner. He had had occasion to observe it in older ones. It did not do to require a virtue above his comprehension of either man or child.

The good-conduct boy had a bunch of buttercups and columbine for Madame Carmel, Etienne some sprays of tamarac for the washing of wounds. Madame and Anne were sitting in the garden beside the house under the apple tree. The boys went up with the Curé. They would have found it easier to give the things to Anne. Madame inspired them with awe, much as she did Yvonne Armaillé. When she smiled, they were hardly encouraged. There are smiles which are like a ray of sunshine falling athwart a deep and shadowy gorge. It may light up the gloom, but only to show the depth more appalling. They twisted their old straw hats,—from one of which a cow had bitten half the brim,—scratched their bare legs, first with one set of toes then with the other, and answered some kindly meant questions. Then they said good-by and went off at a run, calling to another boy to wait for them with a loud Holla!

Madame Carmel was knitting, and the bunch of

flowers lay on her lap against the black gown. Her son stopped before her, took one of the busy hands and lifted it to his lips. She drew it away with a smile and went on knitting. "You should have been an abbé of the old régime, patronized by some fair marquise," she said.

He disclaimed it as not to his taste.

"A militant cardinal," suggested Anne, with a glance at his stalwart size.

"The flesh profiteth nothing much in those matters," he told her. "It was a priest who had to be carried on a sick-litter who subdued the City of the Waters and vanquished Cinq-Mars. No," he finished, "I am where I belong, 'nursing the consciences of women and children.'" He took out the two letters and gave them to be read.

Madame Carmel went into the house presently, taking the flowers and branches. Anne was mending a pile of surplices. She sewed on, and Jean sat absently watching a swallow that flitted back and forth to its nest under the eaves. A vesper sparrow began its song in the tree overhead. His lines were fallen unto him in pleasant places, the Curé reflected. But the life was too easy. Other priests had spent theirs better, — those bold brothers of the mild saint of Assisi who had pressed into the West, carrying the crucifix and preaching a peace which was not in their own souls; or the black-robed followers of Loyola.

As St. Francis himself had, on his mountain side, desired the five wounds of our Lord, almost so the Curé of the village among the forests that had witnessed martyrdom coveted some such ordeals as those men had undergone who had made straight his own way—straight and too smooth.

CHAPTER XIV

AFTER the manner of the savage who beats off evil spirits with noises and the pounding of drums, women, as a rule, seek oblivion in much companionship. But some few turn to work and try to drive back menacing Fate by flinging actions in her face. Anne Carmel's was the latter method—and in any event there had never been any real companionship for her in St. Hilaire, even before she had debarred herself from such as offered. So she made the most of any duties she could find or invent about the house, the church, and the parish in general. They grew the more numerous, too, as Madame Carmel's health, for the first time in her life, began to fail markedly. The bread-baking and the preparing of preserves from their own berry vines, the sewing and knitting, took some little time. For the rest she worked at yards of lace crocheting, quilting, and rag rug-plaiting, for which there was no need. Cécile Gerard profited by several tiny frocks made over from old ones of Anne's or madame's. And on occasions the women on outlying farms were glad to get the Curé's sister in emergencies.

Jean Carmel, with the masculine faith in feminine sincerity, concluded that she was forgetting Harnett and his evil influence. He knew nothing further about it than that she was still receiving letters. They had not talked of the matter in months. He decided, however, that he had been right in supposing that the man would not return to follow up his passing sylvan courtship. And Anne was apparently coming back, at length, to a normal interest in the life about her. It was long before he made even the most distant reference to it, but toward the close of the summer he found her in the street in front of the house, helping amid delighted laughter to get Yvonne's collie harnessed to a small wooden sled. She did not see him coming, and as he passed he stooped down and rumbled her hair with his hand as he had done when she was a child—always the surest way of rousing her indignation in those days. "You are gay, eh, P'tite Chose?" he said. She looked up at him with a smile, a smile that did not seem altogether spontaneous, however. To have let him guess that her love or her fears for Harnett's life were overmastering her had been one thing. To have him suspect that she was beginning to doubt was another. She had borne all manner of humiliations up to now, save that one most unendurable to a proud woman,—having to confess that the man for whom she has been ready to give everything has not

been worthy the sacrifice. And she had not yet admitted it fully to herself.

But her powers of justification were being well tested. Harnett had written to her regularly, though at considerable intervals, even before he had been able to leave the hospital. But the letters were shorter than at first, and, it seemed to her, not a little perfunctory. Then he had gone home to England, and she had expected some immediate result. His uncle was already before him. He had promised to ask at once for permission to marry her, and in the event of either assent or refusal to return for her before the winter should set in and make travel around St. Hilaire all but impracticable. He had been at home, however, for two months and had not yet taken any action beyond, he explained it, preparing the way for the favorable reception of his demand by a greater than usual effort to be obliging and indispensable. His excuses were detailed and reasonable enough, but there was no mistaking a lack of ardor. He was not enthusiastic.

Anne had urged upon her brother at the first that those of their own position and walk in life could form no conception of the exigencies of station and wealth in another manner of world, nor of the complications possible in cases such as Harnett's. And she tried to tell herself so now. But Harnett wrote, first, that his uncle was occupied with affairs of a wider than per-

sonal importance and could not, for the time being, be harassed. Then it was that he himself had been unwillingly obliged to accept an invitation which took him away for some days. Thereafter it was that his uncle's house was filled with visitors—and as if the possibility of his word being doubted occurred to him, he sent cuttings from papers in corroboration. He insisted upon his good intentions. If he could have been sure of, could even have hoped for, the granting of his request, he would not have let a moment be lost, he told her, only, refusal was little less than a certainty. And, in that event, he could clearly not walk out from his home and away from his guests and hie himself back across the Atlantic forthwith. He would have to use discretion, as well as, unfortunately, some subterfuge. His uncle must be allowed to think that the refusal had put an end to the matter out of hand. "After that," he wrote, "I can get off—for the caribou shooting, we will say." It was the only possible handling of the difficulty.

To have it called a difficulty was in itself somewhat of a blow to Anne. There was about it too much of a suggestion of self-sacrifice to an obligation become a trifle irksome. Discretion, dilatory tactics, temporizing, evading, and waiting for seasonable opportunities were foreign to her own nature. She herself had acted on the impulse of a force that drove one on to break down barriers or be broken against them. Har-

nett had written that if his uncle should form suspicions of what they proposed he would take means to prevent it. "It will be too near and too far from a marriage," he had said. And it was quite as probable that disinheritance would follow one as the other.

It had been precisely to save him from the disinheritance and all it implied that she had, in the first instance, made her stand. But consistency was not equal to suppressing a reproach that he should have been willing to dare more for her than he seemed in the least anxious to. It was a reproach, however, which she kept to herself. Then had come a letter saying that the uncle was ill, that there was now no knowing how long the delay might be. "You must not feel yourself bound to me," he wrote. "If you had rather be free, I will not expect you to keep your promise." She saw it as her dismissal. She was alone by the river in the same clump of silver birches where Harnett had first come upon her. The blow had been hard enough to deaden the sensation of pain. She was conscious of an indifference which was a relief. There recurred to her the burden of a habitation song of ancient French origin:—

Les nouvelles que j'ai apporté
Que votre amant vous mande.
Que vous fassiez choix d'un amant,
Pour lui a une amante.

She read the letter over again slowly ; then sat with her hands dropped in her lap. She felt hard and philosophical. He had got back to the life in which he belonged and he had reconsidered, that was all. On the whole he had behaved as well as she had any right to expect. She had said to Jean on the hilltop, in the midst of the storm, "If he should change his mind, or come to think me like any other woman who is only—bad—" Well, he had changed his mind. And possibly he had come to think her like any other bad woman. He wanted her out of his life definitely and was showing the way to her. If she did not take it of her own accord, he would force her to, probably. The best she could do would be to accept the situation once and for all. Certainly she would not whimper, or beg, or reproach.

She sat thinking it all over for a time. Then she put away the letter, stood up, and started back to the presbytère. On the way she met Paul Tetrault, and the smile she gave him encouraged him to turn and walk home with her. He went in. They were alone, and before he left he drew her to him and kissed her for the first time. She made no protest. She even left her hands in his that felt so thick and hot, and laid her head against his shoulder, which smelled of cheap scent. He was kind to her. And she was heartbroken and tired—besides—"que vous fassiez choix d'un amant, pour lui a une amante," she thought cynically.

He left her, and she went into her own room, locking the door behind her and standing stupidly in the middle of the floor.

Paul would ask her to marry him. She knew that. A year ago he would not have kissed her first. She knew that too. But she was not a woman who could be exacting as to the precise degree of respect to be shown her. She would marry him. It did not matter. It was better to marry and be a mother. One man as well as another would do to be the father of her children. If she could ever be warmed into caring for any one again, it might be perhaps for those. And Harnett — she drew a slow, uneven breath. He would have children, too. Their mother — would be some other woman. She threw the back of her hand suddenly across her eyes and stood so. Her mouth fell open, and she swayed. Then she pitched forward on the floor, face down, her arms outstretched, shaking with spasmodic sobs.

No one heard her. She was alone in the house and in her misery. After a time she grew quieter. But she lay there still on the worn, elaborate rag mat of her own plaiting. A sigh quivered out at long intervals. She pillowed her face on her forearm, closing her hot, smarting eyes.

Madame Carmel came to the door and tried it, speaking to her. It was dusk. She got to her feet and smoothed back her hair. Then she went to open the

door, keeping her back to the light. Madame glanced inquiringly around, but she saw no signs of the letter-writing of which she so intensely disapproved, and at which Anne was frequently locked for hours in her room.

Jean had gone down to the river, she said. Anne remembered that she had promised to go up as far as the tourniquet with him. She stood irresolute, looking out at the dusk. Then she crossed lifelessly over to the row of hooks against the wall and took down her shawl. It was the one she had rolled into a cushion for Harnett's head in the quarry bottom. She had not been able to afford a new one, and she had washed out the blood herself at the river.

She went into the hallway. Madame was waiting in the sitting-room door. "Jean received a present this afternoon," she said; and her black brows raised meaningfully. She pointed to it. It was a photograph of Cecily Thorne, not as they had seen her, but a creature of draperies and laces and flowers, diaphanous and slight. In madame's opinion a sacred picture would have been a more fitting present for a priest — if there was need for any whatever.

"Jean asked her for it," Anne reminded her; "he told us that he had." At any rate, it was to be hoped he would not keep it out for all the parish to see. Anne put it up conspicuously. Then she turned to her mother and kissed her on the forehead. "I should

not speak to him about it in that way if I were you," she offered. "It will not be good for him."

She joined Jean on the beach and took her place forward in the canoe. He pushed off. Pilote sprang from the board and swam after them to midstream, but she was left well behind, a wistful yellow head bobbing about above the water and going finally toward shore again.

Jean and Anne headed up the river and went away into the shadows. He told her, after a while, that he had had a letter from Cecily Thorne. In the beginning he had showed the letters to her and his mother; then he had merely read parts of them aloud; at the end, he came to simply giving them any bits of news.

Madame had made a point of not questioning. If Jean were receiving from a Protestant young woman letters which he could not have seen by his mother, since she was not to express her disapproval, she, at least, would manifest no interest whatever. Once, when he had spent his free time in the midst of a retreat writing to Miss Thorne, she had gone so far as to inquire with purpose whether the girl was coming into the Church. "Not so far as I am aware," he had said. "I should not think it probable."

As for Anne, her motives for not questioning were other. Jean did not catechise *her* as to what she heard from Harnett. And she was not, moreover, given to needless speculation upon the affairs of others.

That he chose to write voluminously to a girl whom he had known for three short days, and was never to see again, could have no harm in it, and was clearly no one's concern but his own.

It was a fact that the correspondence, from slight beginnings, had grown to a long letter as often as every month. To Jean Carmel, Cecily Thorne, by reason of her life and of his having no expectation of ever meeting her in the future, was, in a way, an abstraction. They were neither of them restrained by the reticence one retains always toward those who are the nearest in the flesh — an instinctive safeguard against the humiliation and pain which only those brought into close contact with one have the power of inflicting.

"She is not to be married for some months yet," he said between two strokes of his paddle. Anne did not answer. She sat looking ahead over the dark shimmer of the water. Near by they could see well enough in the starlight. But at a little distance it was black and vague. Her life would be like that from now on. She could only endure it by thinking of nothing but the immediate present, or what was close at hand. Beyond that would be the shadows of hopelessness. She would not answer Harnett's letter.

That night when she was in her room again she got all his letters from the place where she kept them hidden and sat with them in her lap. She did not take any of them from their envelopes. She could

not have read them. After a while she gathered them together, wrapped and tied them tightly. The knot would never be undone in all likelihood. She would never look into the package again, but she would keep it. There is always a sense of finality of putting a definite line between the past and the future, when one destroys anything connected closely with a part of one's life.

When she should marry Paul Tetrault, she might be obliged to burn the letters. He would be jealous, even of the past, and small and petty in a number of ways. However — he would be as kind as she had any right to expect, and his affection would be the more insistent because of her very indifference. She shivered. A year ago, when she had been able to think without distaste of marriage with him, she had been more ignorant than she was now, more innocent.

It came about as she had expected. After a week or two Tetrault nerved himself to take the serious step of asking a woman in discredit to be his wife. There was an unfortunate suggestion of condescension, and she felt it. The blood came to her face, and for an instant she thought of refusing him. But if she wanted to punish him, the most ironical manner of doing it would be, after all, to let him marry her. She accepted him.

And that night there was an ugly scene at the presbytère when Madame Tetrault drove in from the

farm with her husband and attacked Anne with all the rage of the female protecting its young. Her Paul, with his pink and white skin and fair hair, he was her pride and favorite. And he was to be sacrificed to the wiles of a bad woman, who had used her ill-learned devices upon him. Jean Carmel endured as long as he could. Then when Madame Tetrault lost all control of herself and turning to the coolly scrutinizing Anne spit epithets in her face, he walked over and laid his hand upon her shoulder with all its weight. "You will stop that, madame," he said, with deliberation — "or you will go out of the house." She went out of the house, Tetrault meek, but angry too, following.

Jean Carmel shut the door behind them and came back into the room. Anne had gone to the table and was mechanically moving things about, with hands which shook visibly. "Well," he asked her, "what do you intend to do?"

She raised her shoulders, her unsteady lips curling. "If Paul wants to change his mind, I will not fall at his feet and beseech him, certainly."

"Otherwise you will marry him?"

"Otherwise I will marry him."

"Do you care for him?"

She smiled at the suggestion. "Is it probable?" she asked. "But I will be what he wants, — his wife, and faithful. You need not be afraid."

His eyes were stern. "I should advise you to break

off the whole affair at once. If you marry him, it will be against my wishes." He did not share Madame Carmel's opinion that Anne was fortunate beyond anything she might have dared to hope.

"I have promised," Anne answered. "But Paul may do as he likes. It does not matter to me."

And Tetrault himself saw that it did not, when he went back to the presbytère, despite the wrath of his parents. The tears came into his eyes. After almost ten years of devotion, after he had, for her sake, dared public opinion and the curses of his parents, when he was ready to endure scorn and some little deprivation for her! It was not kind. But lost faith and hope bring lost charity, and the most she could feel for him was a contemptuous pity. "Don't cry, Paul," she said. "Men who beat one are better." He drew his wrist across his eyes. He did not want to annoy her.

And in the end neither the elder Tetraults nor Jean Carmel had their way. Anne and Paul were engaged to be married, and Madame Carmel rallied for a while, because of her satisfaction. Her daughter was to be made an honest woman and the disgrace wiped out.

Other letters came from Harnett. His uncle was still in a dangerous state. Anne did not miss the fact that he committed himself in nowise as to what he would do in the event of his being left his own master. And whether it were an oversight or an

intentional evasion, it seemed to her equally inexcusable. She did not reply.

He complained of her silence several times, not too bitterly. Then she did not hear from him again.

CHAPTER XV

THE autumn went, closing finally with the ceremonies and confessions of the Toussaint, and the winter came on with its departure of many of the men and boys for the loggers' camps. The farmers and the storekeepers and the housewives, even the work animals, had less to do than during the rest of the year. It was not so with the Curé. He seemed always to be needed more then than at other times. In the long, confined, inactive season there was more chance to forget nature and its joys, and to think of one's soul and its sorrows. And there were more soirées now, too, when the evenings hung heavy and visiting was done somewhat after the fashion set by the earlier habitants of before the Conquest. The Curé was always asked, and he usually went, occasionally even to the dances; for his objection to those was not so marked as that of most of the other priests. And he found that when he was there fewer undesirable results followed the freedom and drinking,—results of whose gravest evils only he, very often, knew.

The drives were frequently troublesome and terribly

cold ; but he objected not so much to that as to the tedious hours of close, stove-heated rooms, reeking with tobacco smoke and even less pleasant odors and fumes, the pointless bucolic gayety, the excited games of casino, and the long-drawn-out absurdities of tales and love, devoid of either wit or moral. He would have been glad to stop at home with his mother and Anne and his books. In the day he had small leisure for reading. From the early morning mass on, there was plenty to be done,—the business of the church and parish to be attended to, baptisms now and then, the daily offices to be recited, and the sermons for saints' days and Sundays to be prepared. In his determination to keep from the mental sloth into which so many of the clergy had sunk, he devoted set hours to study. He had begun again to take certain magazines and journals which he had read regularly upon first coming to St. Hilaire. They were French and English. A priest from Montreal, a friend of his college days, had looked them over questioningly. They were not by any means what he was accustomed to see on the tables of other confrères whom he visited, in villages,—or towns, for that matter. He commented upon them.

“Even we are not always exempt,” Monsieur Carmel said ; “even with us there may be a woman in the case,” and he told him of Cecily Thorne. “For my own credit and that of the clergy, I saw that it

behooved me to be not altogether ignorant of the profane modern world. So now," he swept his hand over the table, "I am a paragon of information — all things considered."

At the end of December there came on the holidays, — Christmas with its religious observances; New Year's Day with its early morning visits to parents and friends, its good wishes and promiscuous kissing, and its high mass; and the Epiphany, until after which the loggers could not be got back to their lonely cabins in the forests.

It was some two weeks from the close of the fêtes that Jean Carmel settled himself in an easy-chair near to the fire for a long and satisfactory evening with a mundane review. Madame was knitting and Anne at work upon the crochet lace which was to be for her wedding clothes, and progressed with about the speed of a Penelope's web.

There was the sound of feet stamping across the porch, and a loud knock followed. Anne put down her lace quickly and went to the door. Her brother had half risen and turned his head, waiting to see who it was had come out at the late hour of nine o'clock and in such a storm, — the worst of the winter so far.

It was Antoine. He stood on the threshold of the sitting room, coated with a fine hoar of ice from the button of his coonskin cap to the soft boots on his feet. His eyes, changing from the darkness into the

light, expanded and contracted like a cat's. He had come in that day, he said, and he was staying at Séailles' cabin. Marcelin was dying. Would m'sieu' go to him? "I have stopped for Coppée—but he says the storm is too bad." Coppée was Séailles' remote but only relative.

Monsieur Carmel rose to his feet and put aside the review. For the first time he had ever known her to offer interference in a matter distinctly his own, Anne protested.

"Jean," she said impatiently, "you cannot do it. It is out of the question. Three miles through the woods on a night like this."

He ignored it. "Come in," he said to the Métis. "Wait for me," and he started toward his room. Anne flushed angrily. But she had the wisdom to know when to withdraw.

Madame Carmel had not. She put herself in her son's way. Surely, he was not going to attempt it. It was three miles. "Well!" he answered, "and if it were six?" But the night was the worst in years. Even Coppée, who had been brought up to the country, would not go; and Marcelin was his own relation. Amélie Latouche had come into the doorway and was joining in the objections. Antoine stood watching with the eyes that spread and narrowed and expressed nothing at all. Monsieur Carmel was close to losing his temper. "Antoine has come, nevertheless," he said, moving his

mother from in front of him. "Antoine!" she answered. "Antoine is a half-breed and a *coureur de bois*." It was not the right argument. It were a pity if a half-breed *coureur de bois* could do more for a friend than a priest could do for a parishioner.

He came out of his room almost immediately, muffled to the bridge of his nose, a fur cap drawn down to his eyebrows. Amélie had lighted his lantern. She gave it to him with a blessing. Monsieur Carmel's lantern was like any other, but Antoine's was a tin one, pierced with tiny holes in circles and patterns. They went out into the shrieking night. And presently from the direction of the church there came the tinkle of the Curé's bell faint on the wild wind. They dropped on their knees, Anne, madame, and the servant, crossing themselves and praying for the departing soul.

When they rose again to their feet, madame went to the window and stood there, as if she could have seen out through the solid wooden shutters. "Is it snowing?" she asked.

Anne shook her head uneasily, "No," she said, "it is an ice storm — and a northeast wind."

Amélie was guilty of a heresy. It seemed to her, she complained, that a worthless old man like Marcelin could have died just as well without dragging out monsieur to help him. "At this hour, too," she said, looking toward the clock — not because she could read its face, but because she knew its use so far

as others were concerned. "At this hour, in such a storm! And he's been as good as dead these twenty years already. By the time monsieur can get there he may be altogether so." She was working herself into spluttering indignation over it. Antoine should have had more sense, she held, even though Marcelin and his sister had not. "If he has behaved himself, I expect he'd go to Heaven just the same without risking a good man's life. And if he hasn't, repenting when he's scared out of the little wits he's got left, won't do him a great deal of good, the bonhomme." Then the thought came to her that she might be referring to a disembodied spirit, and she crossed herself, muttering.

Neither madame nor Anne subscribed to this view of it. In matters of doctrine and religious duties Anne was only a very little less bigoted than her mother. Toward unbelievers her toleration was wider, but that was all. "You would do better," she told Amélie, whose night-capped face looked half frightened already at her own blasphemy,—"you would do better to go to your room and pray for Marcelin." Amélie went off and did so—adding a petition for Monsieur Carmel's safety.

And there was need for it. The Curé and Antoine were well into the forest, taking the most direct path, usually the least travelled. If it had not been for the half-breed, Monsieur Carmel would not have been able to follow it, but Antoine with the lantern was keeping

just ahead. The bell tinkled desultorily now and then, but there was no one to hear it. They were well off from all habitations. The sleet had been falling all day, and freezing as it fell. The ground was ice covered, the trees ice sheathed. In the woods they creaked and crashed as the wind passed through them, roaring, dying down, humming tensely, like the dying vibration of some huge base string, bursting out in a long low howl, beating together the chiming limbs. There were none of the smaller sounds of night. It was all the superb crescendo jubilation in the blackness, of a gale-whipped, icy world, the clashing music of crystal branches through all the hills, beyond and beyond, across the mountains—a Walpurgis Nacht of the demon spirits of the Arctic flocks.

Sharp bits of ice were cutting and driving through the night. Brittle boughs were coming down with a sharp ringing. Whole limbs were breaking off and shivering with a clangor. Sometimes a great dead tree, split down the trunk and torn asunder, rent the boreal diapason with a mighty cry as it gave up its ancient soul.

The Curé pushed on in the wild darkness. His gray woollen mittens were frozen on his hands, his coat was stiff and hard, the muffler over his face was solid, the sleet caked on his eyes. The pain of it made his whole head ache most unendurably. He was dazed from the blow of a snapped-off branch that had struck

upon his neck. "You may be killed, mon père," Antoine had warned on the porch of the presbytère as they had started out. He had not even answered it. But he thought now that death in a great storm — by land or sea — was surely a magnificent thing. To be swirled back into the rush of the elements from which one had come. Once or twice it seemed to him that he was near it. There was a roaring blackness, like that of the night itself, in his head. He could not see the flickering pattern of red gleams from Antoine's lantern, but sharp sparks danced across his eyes. He got a long breath again then, and bent over, keeping on. It was a struggle, but an exultant one.

Antoine turned back and came beside him, his mouth to his ear. They waited. When there fell a lull, the half-breed shouted. There was a way by a branch path, he said, a yet shorter one. It crossed over the Rivière aux Trembles, by the trunk of a fallen tree. There was a hand-rail, of a sort along the trunk — some limbs nailed together. Should they go by there? It was not safe perhaps, but it would save something more than half a mile, and bring them to the cabane in time, it might be. Monsieur Carmel nodded. Antoine went on again. They neither of them had seen, back through the forest, the gleams of another lantern. They had not looked behind. And the loudest calls could not have been heard at the distance of fifty feet. There was some one following, however, and doing his

best to catch them. It was Coppée, whose conscience had reproached him at the sound of the tinkling bell, and who had felt the shame of fearing what a priest and a half-breed did not fear.

After a few moments Antoine turned off to the right, Jean Carmel close to him. The path was very narrow now. The frozen underbrush cracked and crunched. It was not long before Antoine stopped. He lifted the lantern and threw the wavering flickers of its light upon the fallen trunk stretched across a narrow gulf of blackness. The Curé knew the place. He had come to it, but had never gone beyond. The bridge had seemed too uncertain. There was a stream some thirty feet below it. It was a slippery foothold at any time. And now, when it was all smooth ice —

Antoine was shouting in his ear again. He had made the hand-rail himself; it was not rotten. Could m'sieu' do it — or should they go back by the longer path?

The Curé thought of Marcelin. A little time might mean much to the old man, peace to his departing soul. And the longer way had its dangers, too. "Go on," he said. Antoine went on. The flecks of his lantern touched the glistening trunk in front of him, but fell upon nothing at either side — were swallowed up in black space. A stronger rush of wind beat Monsieur Carmel back for an instant. He waited, turning his back. Then he put his hand on the slight rail, and his

foot on the round, glassy bridge. Antoine's soft-shod feet had clung almost like an animal's. He was already across, and looking back could see the glow of a lantern which was not the Curé's. But Jean Carmel was not of the lithe Indian breed. His feet were clumsy booted and they slipped. He was leaning the whole of his weight upon the handrail, never strong, and brittle now with the cold. There came another rush of wind, straight down the course of the stream. It swished along fine darts of ice that struck and cut. The big figure balancing unsurely was full in its path. It threw him sidewise. The rail cracked and gave. Then it broke like a straw.

Antoine on one side and Coppée on the other saw the lantern above the black gulf whirl round in mid air, plunge down beside a dark body, and go out. They held their own lanterns as far up as their arms would reach, but the pin-points of glow showed nothing down beneath. They were not more than a few yards apart, but though Coppée put his hands to his mouth and shouted, no sound reached the opposite bank. Antoine signalled with gestures, and the other understood. On the two sides of the falls they began their steep descent to the surface of the frozen creek. It would have been far from easy at any time. And now, when they could not so much as see the slippery rocks in front of their very faces, it was dangerous. They felt for roots or branches or plants by which to clutch. There were

almost none. Coppée lost his hold once. He regained it, quivering and giddy. But his lantern had fallen and gone out. There remained only Antoine's. If that were to fail, the daylight might be of small use to them when it should come. Coppée had visions of three wrapped shapes stiff and still on the gleaming ice in the yellow light of a storm-cleared dawn.

But the half-breed came to the level in safety. And the pattern of little red lights fell on a huddled figure that did not move.

Later, when Coppée's rubbing and Antoine's burning whiskey had had their effect, the Curé struggled up with help and stood on his feet. His right arm hung broken, bent like a short, twisted root. He staggered, sick with the pain of it. They took him up under the shelter of a rock, where the wind passed over them. The two lanterns were found and lighted again. Antoine went off alone along the surface of the stream. There had to be found a way out by which Monsieur Carmel could climb or be lifted.

Coppée doubted if there were any such within a distance that the Curé could walk. And if so, it must bring them into the woods at a place where there would be no path. It was a bad business. Antoine was a crazy fanatic, thinking only of getting a priest for a moribund dotard, making good and useful men risk their lives.

Monsieur Carmel was swaying again. His eyes were

shut. Coppée desisted from his private maledictions of the man who was desirous of saving the soul of his ancient relative, hung the bent arm in a sling made from his own belt, and administered more whiskey. Then he walked the Curé up and down, back and forth. They were suffering cruelly with the sleet and cold.

It was long before the third lantern came wavering through the night again. But Antoine had found a way. Monsieur, he thought, could be got up with help. There was also a path beyond which would bring them near to Marcelin's cabane. He knew the way.

It was a long one and difficult, and Monsieur Carmel's full weight fell on their locked arms the last few hundred battling yards. He had done his utmost, stumbling along with his teeth still clenched, blinded by the drizzle that stung against his eyes and froze there, buffeted by the wind that struck out his breath, and stunned by the roar in his hurt and bruised head. He could have cried like a child with his dread of a falling branch hitting the numb, broken arm. But at last he felt and knew nothing more until he was in front of the great fireplace in Séailles' cabin.

The long life was not quite ended yet. At midnight, though, it came to its close. The Curé was beside the old man at the last struggling instant. He shut down the lids over the pale, shrunk little eyes that stared wide in horror of the storm which was waiting for

the soul that must go out upon it. It was the left hand which had held the clutching, desperate fingers, that closed the eyes, and laid the crucifix on the sunken breast. The other hung from the belt sling, livid and blue nailed. Even when it was all done the Curé would have knelt for another prayer, but Antoine did not see the necessity for it now. He had made a pile of skins and blankets in front of the fire upon the floor and forced Monsieur Carmel over to it. He worked over the twisted arm, pulling it straight as best he could with what skill he had learned about lumbering camps and on the hunt.

And Marcelin's sister tottered around the rough-board bed, and looked at the small, dirty parchment face that seemed, in the candle-light, to work and move. She touched it with the tips of her withered fingers, drawing them away quickly each time, as a child does with something of which it is more than half afraid. The mind that had never, at the best, been able to take in other than very rudimentary and simple things, was bewildered by all the events of the night. She could not altogether understand that Marcelin was dead. He had looked like that when he slept, as far back as she could recall. For in her memory now he was always withered and old. The time, almost two score years gone by, when he had been a hale old man, was forgotten, as much so as that one infinitely far away when he had been the big boy who

had permitted a baby sister to toddle after him, and had told her sometimes great tales of how he should fight the English before so very long. He had fought the English, and, led back to submission by his own priests, had resigned himself to the conqueror, and lived on under him peaceably, advancing in no respect beyond the status of the parents who had died in the cholera of '34. And old Marie had not grasped it that he was dead now, her companion of much more than the allotted lifetime of usefulness. She did not feel grieved — only puzzled, baffled, as an animal seems to when with another that is cold and still.

She had not grasped, either, that the Curé was hurt. She saw him lying there in the light of the fire against the rough, dark furs — Antoine on one side of him working with the crooked arm, straightening it gradually by sheer strength, Coppée on the other side, squatting on his heels, the whiskey flask ready, and his eyes watching the gray face with more interest in, than pity for, its signs of pain. Just once when she heard a moaning sigh, she came nearer and watched, too. But there was no expression whatever on her features, and presently she turned away and went back to move stupidly around Marcelin's bed again.

The men by the fireplace paid no attention to her. To Coppée his ancient relative was a troublesome old crone. And as for Antoine, his charity was a good deal that of the wild animal, — to let the disabled go

under. Both were far too much concerned with the matter in hand to trouble about Marie. The Curé had endured in rigid silence, then he had lost consciousness again, and for all their efforts he was not to be revived.

CHAPTER XVI

THE effects of the fall were worse than the badly broken arm, so much worse that they were quite beyond the very inadequate experience and comprehension of the doctor who came from the neighboring parish. Not that he said so to Madame Carmel. No amount of risk to a patient would have induced him to depreciate his own worth. But when the Curé could not be roused for days and lay in the same stupor, he advised that the worst was to be made ready for. "You may pray for his recovery, certainly, since all things are possible to medicine and God," he said, "yet you should also pray for his happy death."

Madame not only prayed, but vowed various candles, ranging in weight from a few ounces to a pound, to be burned in honor of the Virgin. And the result was apparent. Jean Carmel had come near to dying, but he lived, to the doctor's proud satisfaction. Through half of February, though, he could not be moved from Marcelin's cabin. The place was almost inaccessible at times, when the snowstorms were

especially heavy. Anne or his mother was always with him. Marie had been sent away temporarily to the Labiscaye cottage. Once or twice Thérèse brought currant wine and a sumach remedy of home manufacture, for colds. No one at the cabin had a cold, but the expression of good-will remained the same. Antoine never went beyond the clearing, unless it were to the village for supplies. Of these there had been almost none on hand, save the pork and dried peas necessary for soup, some inferior flour, and a good store of acorns.

The cabin, though it had only one room and a lean-to, was piled high with earth outside for warmth, and it was fairly comfortable after Anne had cleaned it from ceiling to floor, disposing of cobwebs and insects and the accumulated filth of years. Investigation of the iron kettle on the hook in the fireplace disclosed the residue of what seemed to be the pea soup of a generation. Anne brought ashes and fire to her aid in purifying it, and from then on no one fared badly in the matter of food.

In due course Monsieur Carmel was able to be taken back to St. Hilaire, dragged on a low, wooden sledge by Antoine, and followed by the doctor and Anne. The snow was not heavy, even in the woods, and it was coated over with a hard frost that made it ring under the runners and footfalls.

Antoine had waited to be certain that he was of no

further use, then he disappeared — without word or warning.

Madame Carmel's character was of those that rise to great emergencies and fail signally at lesser ones, much as certain machines are calculated to lift large bodies with ease, but cannot so much as close on something small. She had met her responsibilities admirably during Jean's illness. Directly they were at an end she gave way. Anne took care of her, and was glad of the work. It gave her, for one thing, an excuse to discourage Paul Tetrault from being continually at the presbytère. He complained of it. As he saw it, it was precisely when she was in need or trouble that his place was near her, to be her support. He waxed pathetic over it. Anne kept down her irritation, but the absurdity of looking to him for support was not to be resisted. She smiled and he did not understand it. He was hurt.

The priest from the next parish came several times on visits, and improved a golden opportunity to give the sister of his friend the good counsels of which he was evidently convinced she stood in need. He was of the universal opinion that Monsieur Carmel was too infatuated with his sister to rebuke or guide her successfully. One did not, surely, defer to and consult and treat as if she were superior to most of her kind, a woman who had followed Anne Carmel's course of action. One was charitable to her, to be sure; one

showed sympathy, but one expected her to repent of her sins and keep them ever before her. He was a kindly disposed old man, and Anne accepted his well-meant sermons without other protest than a mental one against his untidy appearance—much as she had thought about Paul Tetrault's thick hands when he had been trying to make her see that she was taking the way to ruin.

Her humility, however, encouraged the priest to believe that he had done her good. And he was anxious to be of service to her. He could not help liking her. He liked her, and he was sorry for her. Whatever the way her feet had trod in the past, he was sure that in the present it was not a soft one. She was colorless and thin. He could realize it the better that he only saw her at intervals; but even her brother had noticed it, and it struck him with especial force one afternoon when she came bringing her sewing to sit beside him where he was reading by the window. He might read to her, she suggested. He began obediently at the page which was open. It was a Latin Horace, and her knowledge of Latin was confined to some few phrases of the mass. She took the book from him and substituted another. He accepted it with entire docility.

She sat sewing and listening to his deep, pulpit-trained voice, keeping her thoughts to it, by an effort of will, for a while. Then they drifted gradually off. She was back in the garden, in the warm, thick dark-

ness of a September night, under the low-branched maples by the gate. She was feeling Harnett close to her, moving irresistibly nearer, touching her hair with his lips, and then her forehead, and then her own lips, holding her to him through a long silence, his face against hers. Her fingers trembled and were useless; her sight blurred. She put her hand to her throat with a gasp for the breath that seemed going from her in a vacuum of hopelessness. Jean looked up from the book quickly. The last line he had read was in her ear, and she repeated it mechanically. "Yes," she said, "I heard you." He went on reading.

In his inaction he had now and then amused himself by making left-handed drawings of her at her work about the house. They were awkward and wavering, but he had something of a facility for caricature, and the likeness was unmistakable. He was encouraged to attempt a laborious slantwise note to Cecily Thorne. Since December she had not written to him. "She is tired of keeping up a correspondence with an unsophisticated country priest," he spoke of it to Anne. "Nevertheless she shall at least have pity upon me while I am disabled. Charity requires it." He wrote. And on an impulse, he slipped into the letter a little silver crucifix worn almost to the thinness of paper. It was one which had belonged long since to a mother superior of the Gray Nuns of Montreal, and had been

sent to her by the Holy Father from Rome. The impulse was one that he took the trouble to explain to himself on the grounds that he was indebted to her for a number of things—ranging from her picture to books and a package of rare poppy seeds. He found the explanation satisfactory.

“I gave an account of my sufferings calculated to melt a heart of stone,” he told his mother. It had been a passing mention, as a reason for the handwriting, that he had broken his arm.

The desired effect was obtained. Cecily Thorne wrote. Having read the letter, Jean Carmel reported that Thorne and his son were to return to the neighborhood in the summer. Thorne had further observations to make in the surrounding country, and the village had pleased him.

It was not the Curé himself who brought about the suggestion that Miss Thorne should be asked to come with them. It was Anne. There came to him on the instant the possibility of a way to perhaps put a stop to the marriage with Paul Tetrault. If Anne could be made to see the little habitant beau through the eyes of a woman from the outer world, whatever inexplicable, exalted, false-romantic notions were in her head now might be got rid of. “You will be married,” he objected. Anne was by no means certain as to that, and said so. She was not pressing the time of the wedding.

If she would agree, he offered, that she would not be married, he would ask Miss Thorne to come. Anne's eyes flashed to her mother's with a quick warning. She had caught a look of disapprobation coming over madame's face, and seen the beginning of a remonstrance. Madame Carmel followed the promptings of submission to a dominant will before she had time to think. The negative which had been on her tongue turned to a coerced consent. And the first time Jean Carmel used his right hand again, it was to write to Cecily Thorne. She could be of service, possibly, he told her, in keeping from a false step a girl who had been near to making one already, and now, in her mistaken estimate of many things, was determined to make another hardly less serious. He read it over. The reason was sufficient and excellent. It satisfied him.

It was well into May that the answer arrived, when the late spring was brought in on a southeast storm which melted the last ice in the creeks and rivers and lakes. Cecily would come—at midsummer.

Before that time there was more than one change at the presbytère.

On Corpus Christi Day Yvonne Armaillé walked in the procession from altar to altar, a bunchy little white figure among a score of other small maidens, uncomfortably happy in their robes de fête, and not a little cold by reason of a chilling spring wind. From

the church she was hurried back by Madame Gerard to her own house to say good-by to the great-grandmother. Madame Gerard was weeping, and the people on the street said "Pauvre p'tite" as she passed, so Yvonne snivelled too, and rubbed her button of a nose shiny red. The little old woman sat in her arm-chair to the last. She bequeathed the care of the child to Monsieur Carmel, the only living being in whom she had faith. "Don't let your sister have the training of her, though," she added in her toothless, hissing voice, with senile spite.

From that day Yvonne, heavily in black, went to live with the Curé. She was wretched in the new importance thrust upon her, making her the centre of observation. She was an orphan, and heir to the great-grandmother's land, cottage, and savings, and she was easily the most prominent personage in the parish. Yet she would have foregone the elegant weight and stuffiness of her sable frocks, and all claim to her wealth, to have attracted less attention and sympathy.

So the presbytère acquired a new inmate. And within a month it lost another.

The doctor had been of opinion, from the first time he had been consulted, that Madame Carmel's trouble was of the heart. He considered that diagnosis, and the successful outcome of his treatment of the Curé on the occasion of the accident at the Rivière aux Trembles, as

the two feathers in his professional cap. Madame fell back on her bed as she rose, one morning, and that night she died. There had been no time to send farther for another doctor. And for that matter there had been no money. The parish of St. Hilaire was barely able to raise the necessary four hundred a year to pay its priest. And Jean Carmel was a poor man. It was the first time that he had been actually made to feel it.

He sat beside his mother's bed for three hours. The chair was stiff and upright, but he had not moved. She was either asleep or bearing pain with her eyes closed, and he did not want to disturb her. The corners of her mouth were drawn down, there was a frowning line deep between her brows, and her face was leaden against the pillow. Anne was in another room with the doctor and the much-subdued Yvonne. Once she came and opened the door noiselessly. He turned his head and motioned her away. Then he resumed his waiting, and watched the rain, falling in straight slanting lines from the sombre sky, frothing down the rough fork of a tree just outside the window.

He believed that his mother had something to say to him. Until she had closed her eyes she had followed him with them, and there had been the expression on her face of one who is upon the very point of speaking, but cannot make the determination. There was the

same look when she stirred at last. She had not been asleep, she said. He knew by the twitching of her mouth and the clenching of her teeth that she was in pain. He would have gone for the doctor, but she put out her thin hand, cracked, and bent at the finger tips like that of a much older woman. She laid it on his, and it was cold. "Wait," she said, between the tight teeth. He obeyed, and when the paroxysm had gone off she drew him nearer and spoke to him. He must not let Cecily Thorne come back to St. Hilaire. Her black eyes, a little wild and glassy now, were fixed on his compellingly. It was the first intimation of her disapproval that he had had. He was too much a man to have possessed Anne's comprehension of the unexpressed. He was not intuitive.

"She is a woman," she said, "the sort of woman that you could love. If she is near you, you will love her. You are ready for it now. And because you are a priest," she stopped and fought for breath, her face distorted and fierce with the strain — "because you are a priest, it will mean one of three things: unhappiness, or disgrace — or sin."

He took his hand from hers quickly. Then he forced himself to put it back again. After all, she was dying. A physical ordeal would have been easier for him than to have talked of it to her, but he overcame the repugnance. It was to no purpose that he tried to show her the impossibility of the thing, and even as he did his

best to make her see it, it became less and less evident to himself. There are many faiths and convictions that vanish when we bring them out into the air of controversy and argument, like the genii of the fairy tales that, once freed from the bottle, melted away into nothing.

In the end he promised what she wished him to. It was a small matter to him whether or not the girl should come again. And it was a vital one to his mother.

There was another nearly as vital, it seemed,—that Anne should be married as soon as possible now. To that he would not give his promise. He held his ground firmly, for all his gentleness. The marriage was a bad one from every point of view, except, perhaps, that of retrieving her name in the parish. That the man had money, as it was counted here, was of no importance. Anne did not love him, she clearly could not and never would. “She cannot help realizing that she is too good for him,” he said.

“Too good!” she answered impatiently.

“Yes,” he kept to it, “much too good.”

“No,” said his mother, with her bitterness no longer pent up, “it is because she loves the other one still.” He raised his brows. As to that, he did not know. But the fact that in the bottom of her heart Anne despised Tetrault, remained. And all the influence which he felt one could be justified in using to change

the course of another's life, he would use to prevent the marriage.

She closed the hollow, tragedy-fraught eyes again, and he watched her trying for breath. The struggle went on for hours. Once there was a cessation, and she motioned for Anne and the doctor to go out of the room. She held to her son's hand. Would he not do as she wished? "It is the last thing I shall ever ask of you, remember," she was ungenerous enough to plead. He hesitated. His mouth pressed into a straight line as he nerved himself. "I cannot," he said.

He met full her look of hard reproach. It was the last she gave him.

At sunset he and Anne knelt together beside the bed. He rose from his knees and laid his hand on the bowed head. They went over to the window and stood there, looking off to where the leaves of some distant elms were stirring in the evening wind, high against the bright pink and violet of the cleared evening sky. "There are only two of us now, P'tite Chose," he said.

It was almost a week later that the postmistress gave two letters to Monsieur Carmel. One was for himself, the other for Anne. Anne's mail was sent to the presbytère now, with the rest. He opened his own envelope. Cecily Thorne wrote that she was already on her way to St. Hilaire, by slow stages, walking much of the

way and camping frequently. He calculated the dates. And he knew that she could not have received the letter he had written in fulfilment of the promise to his mother. She had not received it in time, and would not. She was to be at the village within four days. It could not be helped now. He had done his part, but the matter was taken out of his hands.

Anne had gone into the churchyard and was planting flowers on the new grave. The gate under the high stone arch was open, and the rank grass and violets were too thick for his footfalls to be heard. She had finished the work and was standing, looking down. Her black gown had been opened at the neck to make the bending easier, and the sleeves were rolled back above the elbow. She had the strong throat and long arms of Rossetti's women, he thought. She carried an old stone jug in one hand, and a rusty case-knife in the other. There were earth stains to her wrists. She did not see him coming and was off her guard. The lines that the past two years had put on her face were startling. He had not noticed them until now. They brought out a likeness to her mother, and as a rule there was no resemblance. He could not help knowing that it was a better face than Madame Carmel's had been. The trait in the latter which had made it possible for her to leave him, as a lifelong memory, that her last look had been one of unmerited reproach, was not in Anne.

She raised her head as he stopped beside her. He held out the letter. The address was uppermost. She glanced down at it indifferently. He saw the change that came over her, and he put out his hand instinctively. But there was no need for it. She turned with forced deliberation and set down the stone jug. Then she took the letter. Her hand was shaking. She raised her heavy lids slowly and met his look. And she answered the question he would not ask. "Yes," she said, "it is from him." She left him beside the mound and went out through the archway. He heard the side gate of the presbytère garden close behind her.

CHAPTER XVII

YVONNE was under the apple tree on the grass when Jean Carmel came out upon the porch of the presbytère. There was a boy with her. It was Etienne, youngest son of Coppée, the violin virtuoso of the town. Etienne's devotion to Yvonne was a matter of six weeks' standing now. He spent his days at the presbytère, and his evenings, if he was allowed to. He was her first sweetheart, and, perhaps, the Curé thought, as he watched the two heads just visible above the brilliant poppy bed, perhaps the only one she would ever have to whom the dowry — the fact that she was heiress to what was estimated as high as several thousand dollars — was not of the least consequence. He was disinterested. It was a case of lion in love. Etienne's ambition in life hitherto had been to join in the games of the bigger boys, the which were not numerous nor skilful. He had left all that now, forsaken it completely. He played house, and even dolls, and found it rather enjoyable on the whole. The small human male's scorn of dolls is pretty generally an affectation, one of his first con-

ventional lies, and when the feminine portion of the nursery is not observing, he not infrequently is to be caught watching her mothering with longing eyes.

Yvonne's knowledge of the accepted establishment, husband, wife, and children, was limited. Her bashfulness had kept her out of the neighbors' houses for the most part. So Etienne had to teach her. At first it had resulted in difficulties of a common enough domestic nature. As Etienne had observed the working out of things, the husband gave orders and the wife, though she might indeed protest, obeyed. In Yvonne's experience it had been precisely the other way. Her great-grandmother had dominated the men about the place. And in the presbytère there was never any question of authority one way or another. Monsieur le Curé and Mademoiselle Anne always wanted the same thing. If you asked permission of mademoiselle and it was granted, you can be sure that monsieur would not object and revoke it. And it was also the other way round.

So Yvonne was not prepared by example to accept the condition of things which Etienne assured her was the only possible one. The reason why her verdict and opinion were not in every way of as much worth as his could not be made clear to her. And she had the firmness of a stolid nature. Her bashfulness argued no humility or poor opinion of herself whatever. And, besides, she was not bashful with Etienne. Her attitude

toward him had been, from the first, that of one who deigns to accept homage. That had been natural and proper, of course, until it had come to playing house. Then Etienne had explained that the positions were necessarily reversed. The which Yvonne had so densely refused to see that he had perforce given up the exposition in sheer weariness. The housekeeping was now run on the only basis that the young heiress found satisfactory. She was the mistress, and Etienne did as she wished and provided for her and his family of two dolls and the collie. Pilote gave the arrangement her sanction, but she had too much to do, keeping track of Monsieur Carmel, to play with children.

The Curé and Anne had derived no little amusement from watching developments. And Anne had rejoiced in the victory of her own sex in a way that caused the much-perplexed Paul uneasiness. Jean Carmel had watched the young husband's mild submission, and acceptance of the secondary place. "That," he opined, running his fingers through his hair in serious contemplation of the little human comedy, "that is what we escape when we retreat in time. The only way for us to retain our pleasing belief in the inherent superiority of the male is to enter a monastery or the priesthood, and never put it to the test."

The miniature household had run with truly admirable smoothness, for Yvonne's stubbornness was of the invincibly amiable sort. The two played in peace,

uninterrupted by squabbles. They were doing so now as Monsieur Carmel stood on the steps and watched them. Then he went over in their direction.

"Mademoiselle Thorne is coming this afternoon," he said. Yvonne sat still and looked up at him, her round, deep red mouth, partly open, and an expression of attention in her black eyes. Etienne paid no heed whatever. He was making the bed for the oldest doll. "You have heard my sister and me speaking of Mademoiselle Thorne," he reminded. The healthy countenance was still quite blank. If she had heard, it was evident that she had not marked. "You remember," he insisted, "the demoiselle who was here last summer when your dog had the broken paw." Still only the attentive black eyes and the half-open crimson mouth. "She had hair like the color of the wheat in late August," he tried it; but though such hair was surely sufficiently different from anything she had ever been accustomed to seeing in St. Hilaire, no picture was called to her mind. She knew the color of wheat in August, but she did not know Cecily Thorne. Either she had been too frightened to receive any impression or there had been one of those curious blanks of memory that are common to childhood's extraordinary serene self-absorption. She had no recollection of any such person as Monsieur le Curé tried to describe, and she shook her round head. "Well, at any rate," he abandoned it, "we are to

have a visitor to-day. Shall we go and gather some flowers for her?" This was intelligible. The two of them scrambled to their feet at once, and the collie stood ready wagging its tail expectantly. Etienne abandoned the bed-making and the larger doll. Yvonne, more mindful of parental responsibilities, carried the other by its battered head, while its two legs and one arm jerked about. They set off to where there was a meadow full of marguerites.

The children walked around in the flowers to their waists, bending and picking until their hands were crowded, then making their way over to Monsieur Carmel, where he sat reading in the shade of a willow. The afternoon was hot, and the beaver hat had been laid aside as usual. Yvonne's doll lay limply across it. He gathered the flowers into a man's stiff, uncompromising bunches and tied them with the stems, taking his time about it. He had no means of knowing when the Thornes would reach the village, though as the probable moment had come nearer he had given way to an ignominious impulse to put off the meeting. So he had left the house and called the children into service. In the alchemy of the mind there is sometimes needed only the one dropped word to declare the character of a theretofore doubtful sentiment. And Madame Carmel's warning had effected it for him. He did not love Cecily Thorne, so much he was certain of; but he was ready to. It

would have been a relief to have heard that she was not coming after all—yet the relief that lies in having the unattainable removed from one's sight—a dreary one at best.

Before long he noticed that the children had stopped work and were standing still, looking toward the road. He turned his head and looked too. Half-way across the stretch of daisies he saw two women coming. The quivering yellow sunshine was in his eyes, and for an instant he had only the impression that one was all dark, the other all light. Then he knew that they were Anne and Cecily Thorne. They would have served for figures of Tragedy and Poetry, Anne with her head straight, and that hint of the defensive which had become a habit now, her gown black against the waving stretch of flowers, Cecily with the forward bend of her laden uncovered head, and the pale tan of her dress taking light from the July sun. It had been always in light that he had had his impressions of her—as she had come into the ray that had pierced down among the trees into the high-road; as she had waited in the doorway of the presbytère, meeting Anne's repellent look from out the shadow; as she had stood under the shadow of the new-budding oak in the midst of the riverside meadow; as he had seen her going along the street of the village, out of his world, back to hers—and now, in this glare of bright white and gold. He

glanced at the children. Etienne had tried to drag Yvonne forward to do her duty, but she was seized with another stroke of bashfulness. He still held her by one of the fat, green-stained hands and was doing his best to pull her up from where she had plumped down upon the ground in her dismay, her face round, wooden, and red, submerged in the marguerites.

Jean Carmel strode over to her and flung her aloft upon his shoulders. Etienne went by his side, and so, reënforced, he ploughed his way over to Anne and Cecily through the knee-high field of flowers.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE cabin which had once been Marcelin Séailles' was deserted now. Old Marie was living with Coppée. As a partial offset to the cost of the useless addition to an already fair-sized family, Coppée had possessed himself of all in the place from the iron pot and hook in the hearth to the rough board bed with its high sides, and the square wooden seats. The room was empty of everything, but a short, thick log set on end, which had served as a stool, and a bench of an old axe-smoothed board nailed against the wall.

Harnett stood and looked around. There was the chill mustiness of all abandoned rooms, although it was a hot summer midmorning. He had shut the clumsy door behind him, and the one window was small, grime-covered, and cobwebbed, so that it let in little light. He walked over to it. The sill was thick with brittle dead flies and mosquitoes. He was a man to be influenced by his surroundings. And these were depressing. So was the long waiting. A squirrel came out into the weed-grown clearing in front of the cabin and ran back and forth, or sat up suddenly, quivering

its nose as it scented humanity. He watched it. After a time he went to the bench against the wall and sat there, bending forward, his elbows on his knees, his hands hanging. In the silence he could hear the blood singing in his own ears.

When almost an hour had gone by, he got up and went back to the window. Even the squirrel was not in sight now. There was nothing but the clearing, fast being eaten up by the encroaching forest again, since even this soon two or three young red-maple shoots had a good start beyond the dense green of the trees a few yards away, — Nature vanquishing man, as always, patiently, quietly denying his conceited claim to dominion over all the earth and over "every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth"; persistent, as slow as the moving of her glaciers which had ground smooth the surface of that rock at the edge of the open — as irresistible. Where was the use of attempting to evade her? You yourself might succeed for the very reason that you were so grotesquely short-lived, the mere individual of whom she in her concern of the species made small account. Yet her principles would be quite unchanged and unaffected. You cleared your patch in the forest. When you had yourself gone the way of the leaves of the year before, the forest would return. You defeated your love. But the instinct would have its way with the race. And to what purpose would have been the desperate wretched

struggle of an atom of humanity driven by a figment of its own brain to opposing a cosmic force? "A wave of the great waves of Destiny, convulsed at a checked impulse of the heart"—yet why check it when all the others would come rolling and surging on precisely the same?

The branches and foliage were not stirring in the warm morning, though there was sometimes a flicker of wings back among them. If there were a sound in the woods, it did not come into the cabin. The traces of where two paths emerged into the clearing were still fairly plain, though the undergrowth and higher boughs were filling them up. Before long he knew that something dark was moving along one. He drew back out of sight and thought hurriedly of what his best course would be in the event of any one trying to get in.

Anne came into the open space, gave a quick look around, and at the window, then pushed open the door, shut it again, and faced him.

Half the width of the cabin was between them, and she was in the shadow. Neither of them spoke. He was the first to move. He went toward her with both his hands held out. She drew back, and he stopped, dropping his arms at his sides. "Very well," he said coldly. "You are probably right. I thought," he added, "that you had decided not to come."

"I wrote you that I would," she told him. "It was not easy to get away. I had to wait my chance, and I

was delayed. I must be back before noon. And now that I am here—what is it you want?”

He turned away and walked to the farther corner. “I don’t know,” he answered,—“unless it is you.” Their eyes met again. He saw in hers the unhappiness he had put there; and she saw in his one of which she had no knowledge, yet against which she could tell that he was in rebellion.

“You have been a long time deciding that,” she said. She was not bitter, hardly even reproachful.

“Yes,” he answered, “I have been a long time. Why,” he asked her abruptly, “why did you stop writing to me?”

“Don’t do that, please,” she said quietly. “Don’t try to shift any of the responsibility on me. If you are not going to be honest with yourself,—with us both,—I may as well go back now. You know why I did not write.”

“At least,” he insisted, “you might have let me know that you had done with me. You might have given me the chance to defend myself, Anne.”

“I might have complained—?” She shook her head. “My love was too good to beg even you to keep it.”

“But I imagined all manner of things—and, God knows, I had enough to worry me without that. I thought perhaps your letters or mine were miscarrying—or that you had stopped caring for me.”

“You didn’t really think that,” she corrected him,

confidently. "You were only willing to let yourself try to."

She crossed over to the log and sat on it, in front of the black and empty fireplace. "It is very curious how one can lie to oneself," she said reflectively. It was hardly an original bit of philosophizing, but the personal tone struck him.

"Have you done it?" he questioned.

"Yes," she answered.

"As to what?" he wanted to know.

"As to my doing well enough by marrying a man I detest."

He started. "You are not married — Anne?"

"No," she told him; "I am to be."

His face darkened. "To whom?"

"To Paul Tetrault."

He burst out with an unpleasant laugh. Then he checked himself. "Are you going to give yourself to—that pink and white, frizzed *petit maître* of a habitant parish? Is he going to have the right to call your fine soul and beautiful body his? Is he to have those long firm hands of yours for his property, and to bury his own thick, ring-covered, peasant ones in all that mass of brown hair of yours? Good God, Anne! you might better have come to me on any terms. It would have been less indecent, less disgusting—much less wrong."

"I was ready to," she reminded him.

He went over to the bench and put one foot upon it, leaning on his raised knee. "Are you ready to now?" he asked deliberately, watching her closely.

"Is that what you came for?" she said.

"I don't know," he repeated, frowning uncertainly. He seemed to be thinking, and she sat waiting immovably. "You remember," he began, "the first time I met you—the evening when I came upon you among these birches by the river — and afterwards when you walked down the path through the garden and the deep red dahlias? You remember that I went away the next day? I had no notion then of returning. I hadn't thought about you at all, except as an uncommonly handsome girl, and not at all the sort I had found in other small parishes. Then, the first thing I knew, I was back at St. Hilaire, and over at the village on a trivial excuse. I hadn't intended going there. But I went as irresistibly as a man who is lost in a blizzard walks in a circle. And that is about how I've done it this time. Only this time I knew I wanted to see you, and then I didn't.

"Wanted to see you!" He stood straight suddenly. "You can't think how I've wanted it. Some men will drink when they hate themselves for it, could almost kill themselves to escape it—and do very often—when they know it is their ruin. And even that is as nothing to this." He waited a minute, then went back to his position with one foot on the bench.

"I was told that I had to come over here on business," he went on, holding himself down to quiet. "It was my uncle who sent me. I objected — oh, yes! I objected, but just short of enough to make him send some one else. He would have done it if I'd showed him I was in real earnest. The trouble was — I was mightily afraid he would. Otherwise I should have told him why it was best for me not to be in this part of the world, and he'd have been only too quick to save me. I question if we ever mean from the bottom of our hearts, 'lead us not into temptation.' I didn't, at any rate. If any one had tried to lead me off from it, I'd probably have broken away and worked up a fiction for my own satisfaction to the effect that avoiding a danger was unworthy." His lip raised in disdain of himself. "However, I said I'd rather not come over; and at the first indication of his taking me at my word, I had my traps ready inside of two hours. He commended my willingness and alacrity. And it never entered his politics-filled mind that it might have anything to do with the woman he'd refused his consent to having me marry."

"Then —" Anne began and stopped.

He raised his head and looked at her. "You mean did I ever ask the permission? Yes; I asked it. And I got the answer I fully expected, of course. When I stuck to it rather doggedly he was so good as to tell me that I was of age and could follow my own picturesque fancy if I chose to, and that if I were determined to he would give

me for wedding present the cash I had in my pocket, which was ten pounds just then, and the clothes I had in my wardrobe." His fingers played an angry tattoo on the wall, and he gave a sneering laugh. "But I began to tell you how I came here. When I was on the steamer I made all manner of solemn vows that I would attend to my business in the cities and then go down to the States direct. Part of my errand takes me there, too. I knew all the while that I wouldn't do anything of the sort. When I finished the business—and I dragged it out unconscionably in the daytime by every ingenious device, although I lay awake at night thrashing around in my impatience to have done with it—when I finished the business, I went posting down to buy my ticket for the States. I didn't buy it. I asked some questions and said I would be back. Then I went to the hotel and wrote to you. I waited until you answered, but I'd have come here whether you had or not. I almost made up my mind not to lose the time, as it was. I did some more convincing myself that I only wanted to see how you were and try to set myself a little right with you and explain things if you despised me—or if you didn't despise me, to try and show you that you ought to." He began to walk back and forth across the boards, his hands in his pockets and his head down. Anne was not watching him. She was looking into the blackened fireplace.

"I assured myself I had only the most indifferently

friendly feeling for you, such as any man would be likely to have for a girl who had once been a great deal to him and who had loved him. I simply wanted to smooth things out and show my good inclinations. I didn't want to leave you with any bitterness or regrets. And I owed you some sort of explanation of — a good many things. Yes — as you say, it is extraordinary how you can lie to yourself and believe it, though it may all be so specious and flimsy that if you were to tell any one else, he'd laugh in your face."

He came in front of her and stopped. "Look up at me," he commanded, and laid his hand on her shoulder heavily. "Do you still care for me, Anne?"

In the silence that followed, the whistling of a bird in the forest came faintly in to them. He caught her two hands from her lap and held them to his face and lips. Then he dropped them roughly and went away to the window. In one of those blanks of respite that come to the mind's pain, as well as to the body's, he noticed the dead flies and mosquitoes again, and felt the dreariness of the spot. He took a burnt match which lay on the sill and traced a spiral in the caked dust of the panes.

He threw the match away and faced around.

"Anne — I am married," he said.

He watched a twitching, meaningless smile come over her mouth. Her whole face contracted once, and was quiet. He had been close, at one time, to

a man who had been shot cleanly through the heart. And the man had done just that.

There was another long silence. He stood by her and put his hand on her head. She did not move. "Shall I go away now?" he asked. "Or will you let me tell you—let me set myself right the little I can?" He took it for consent that she did not answer. He bent over and looked into her face. She was not crying. There were no tears in the wide gray eyes. They did not seem to see him. "Anne!" he spoke uneasily.

"Yes, tell me," she said. "It doesn't matter."

He put his arm around her and she was passive. "Have I broken your heart, dear?" he said. There was the twitching, blank half-smile again, but the eyes were as without expression as if she had been blind.

"I thought it was broken a long while ago," she told him. "But I must have had some hope without quite realizing it—a very little."

"And now you have none?" he said, with a faint note of dissatisfaction.

"How could I have?" she asked monotonously.

He left her and crossed again to the board against the wall, sitting on it, and clasping his hands about his knees. "Do you recall that I told you once when we were talking over—our future—that it was planned for me to marry some one, with the choosing of whom I had had nothing whatever to do?"

She nodded mechanically.

"Yes," he said. "I tried to make you understand that the thing is done now and then in England,—in all old countries. Your men and women here in the New World won't put up with it; and as one never has to put up with anything when one won't, they don't have to. Conditions are different here, too, and that counts for a good deal, though perhaps it oughtn't to. Circumstances aren't like the good old mediæval torture, which kept a man from just stretching out to his full stature in any direction. There isn't the screw-pressure of generations of tradition brought to bear on him." He looked at her to see if she was understanding, but her face told nothing.

"Well," he went on, "from the time that I went to my uncle's care, from the time I was half a dozen years old, it was planned that I was to marry the girl. She hadn't been out of swaddling clothes quite as long as I had. There were all manner of reasons for our marriage, except only the entirely trivial one of our caring for one another. And we were to have been joined together when I should have been twenty-one and she nineteen. It was an ideal arrangement. Only unfortunately we didn't fit in with the plans altogether. I wasn't sure what her attitude was, and I didn't take the trouble to find out. When the time appointed for the engagement came around, I was absorbed in an infatuation. I was twenty, and I was sure I had found the only woman I could ever think about for a moment.

She was nobody at all, so I was torn away from her and sent a-travelling. Long before I got back I had forgotten all about her, of course. But I wasn't any more inclined to marry, as it was arranged for me, than I had ever been. The matter wasn't pressed. So it slid on that way from year to year, until after I had known you and gone home."

He changed his position, clasping his hands behind his head and leaning against the split logs of the wall. "I wrote you that I had to go on a visit?" She nodded again. "It was to her place. And I wrote you that our house was filled with people. She and her mother and her relatives and backers generally, they were. Every one of them were after me in one fashion or another." He turned quickly. "All but herself, that is. It was none of her fault, poor girl." If she had doubted all his words, she could not have doubted the cool pity of the tone, the mere sympathy and fellow-feeling.

"Then my uncle came after me with some gentle persuasion in the shape of my duty to myself and the girl and the generation yet unborn. He enforced it with some ambitious inducements, a good beginning in life generally—and some financial considerations. I evaded the issue even then. And after that there came the illness I wrote you of." He looked at her gravely. "It was the time that I needed your letters the most—and your faith. The time that every pressure was being brought

to bear on me. A great deal is my fault. But that much is yours. I admit you had your justification. Only you were in no position to judge of me and my actions. If you had trusted me, even when I seemed most untrustworthy, it might have been better." He could see that it had its effect, and hers was of those generous characters to which there is no appeal so powerful as that they have been unkind or unjust.

"So then," he said, "when he was up and about again, and back at the subject, I brought myself to it and told him I wanted to marry you. He wouldn't even so much as take it seriously at first. A Roman Catholic priest's penniless sister, dwelling among the mountains — and beautiful! Yes, he could believe that she might be beautiful; some of the most alluring women he had ever seen in any part of the world he admitted, had been the better class French-Canadians. He said it was delightful, and all that could be desired from the standpoint of the picturesque; altogether on the russet gown and single rose order." His voice was angry with recollection of the sarcasm. "When I grew persistent, he changed his tactics. I might have my ten pounds and you, by all means, if I were determined upon it." He stopped. "I wonder if you've faith enough in me left, to believe that I wish now, I had?" He was walking back and forth again.

She looked away from the fireplace and at his face. The dim light from the window was on it, and she could

see it well. There was showing all the harrying of the time he was telling her about. He looked hunted and driven. His blue eye had grown slate-color and hard. "Yes," she said slowly, "I believe that. Yet, if you were to have it to do over again to-morrow — I wonder if you would not do the same thing?"

He laughed shortly. She had herself and the situation very fairly in hand — and himself, too. She was sure of herself, for all that she was unhappy. A woman sure of herself and not foolishly innocent was well armed. "You have grown sceptical;" he fell into sarcasm himself. "Your knowledge of me has broadened. And I have only myself to thank for it. Well — perhaps I might. I have never shown so much strength of purpose that you could be justified in putting unlimited belief in me, certainly." He went on with his restless walking. "To continue the story, then: I stormed and raised merry Cain to an extent, but he isn't the man to be moved by anything of that kind. He added up a column of figures, statistics, while I raved about the primitive rights of man. And when he had finished, he suggested that Werther and the *Nouvelle Héloïse* style were obsolete."

There was a sound outside the cabin. Harnett crossed softly and quickly to the window. "It's a man," he said, whispering. She had disappeared into the lean-to, already. He slid the clumsy wooden bolt quietly; then waited ready to resist if it should be

forced. It was the first time he had stood to her as a protector. Her certainty of herself weakened as she watched him. He had already appealed to her generosity, and now it was to her femininity.

The attempt on the door was given over. A face was pressed to the window, but the cabin was almost dark, and the corner where Harnett stood was not visible from there. The man went away and plunged in among the trees. Anne came out. "It was Antoine," she said. "He used to come here to stay with Séailles when he was in the neighborhood."

She leaned against the chimney now instead of taking the log stool again. Harnett went on with the account: "I came down by degrees from my lofty flights," he said, "I might tell you that it was for the girl's sake — or from a sense of duty. But I am not trying to color it prettily — and it was neither more nor less than that I was ambitious and was unwilling to give up what I had been born to, what I was accustomed to having. He had the girl and her supporters at the house again, and before the house-party broke up, I was engaged." He saw a question on Anne's face.

"Are you wondering why I didn't come for you whether or no, as we had agreed? You may not believe it, but I have my better moments — have had, at any rate. I thought of it. I was within an inch of doing it. Once I even made some arrangements. Then I told myself that the only thing I could do for you which

would really be worthy the name of love — would be not to lose you body and soul. I was right, too. For once I didn't consider myself, and I was right. We had drifted apart, and you hadn't answered my letters. Not that they deserved answering, I admit. You might have forgotten me, or found you didn't care for me so much after all. Perhaps you'd come to despise me. Whatever it was — you were a good woman and deserved a last vestige of respect from me." She turned to him with a look he had not seen since the days, two years gone by, when he had come to the meeting places, — a look of so much happiness that he cut himself off abruptly.

"Did you always think of me as good, never that I was like any other who —" she hesitated.

"Except that one time when I listened to the Tetrault hag and let you meet me at the quarry, Anne — except that one time I had not the shadow of a doubt of you." The first tears came into her eyes. But there was a smile behind them.

"And then," he said, "I knew very well that, though you had sworn the contrary, if I were to have given up everything and come back here and have made you marry me, you couldn't have withstood me." She started to protest. "No, you couldn't," he contradicted. "You would have married me, and I was perfectly aware of it. I was afraid of being a beggar, or the next thing to it. And my world had a

great deal to offer me. Oh! I have had my chance," he said bitterly. "I've had my chance to marry the woman I should have taken—the one that was meant for me—if you believe in that. But I considered money and a few other things. I sold what I was entitled to."

She remembered Jean's argument of long before, when they had talked together in the lamplight after their mother had left them alone. "Your birthright," she said.

"Yes," he answered, "I bartered it; and now I am weak enough to make complaint."

"So I was duly married," he brought about the conclusion. "That evening, when we were alone—there was an explanation." He took his place on the bench once more, with his hands about his knee, and watched his foot swinging, with considerable apparent interest. "We did each other the one possible service, and told the whole truth. She let me know that she had been forced to the marriage quite as neatly as I had, and that there was another chap—had been for years. He was poor, poor devil. I could more or less parallel the case, with just a reversal of the sexes. The beauty of the situation was something appalling." He shifted his position and sat as he had while he had been waiting for her, his hands hanging inertly and his head down.

"However," he said, and his voice came hard, "they

had got what they wanted — all but we two. The fortunes and the estates were married. They wonder occasionally, I have been told, why we neither of us seem as ecstatically happy as we might surely be expected to." He was silent for a long minute. "The first time I saw you, and thought of you, Anne," he said dully, "it was to fancy you as the type of a fine motherhood. I have no child."

He felt her coming deliberately toward him, and saw the bottom of her black skirt on the dusty boards, as she stopped in front of him. Yet he did not look up at once. She stood there, and he raised his eyes wearily, indifferently.

A ray of the morning sunlight had reached the dusty window, and it fell through, deadened, straight upon his face, haggard and worn, with all the youth gone.

She put out her two hands. For a moment he seemed to doubt her meaning. Then he took them. He rose slowly, and as slowly he took off her hat and dropped it on the floor, drew her into his arms, and kissed her.

After a time her head lay on his shoulder ; her eyes were closed and her lips apart. His cheek rested against the warm thickness of her hair.

CHAPTER XIX

It is a commonplace of human nature that characteristics entirely foreign to one's own are frequently those which most arouse one's admiration. And it was possibly because his every trait was opposed to the requirements of the "Manual of Spiritual Exercises," and to the maxims and ethics of the ex-soldier of Pampeluna, that Jean Carmel found much to admire in both the theory and history of that Company of Jesus — opposed of popes — which from the first has lurked behind massacres and murders, yet has instituted the reformation of morals within the church, which has poured out its best blood on the soil of foreign missions, the while it stooped to assimilation with the faiths of the idolaters it would have won, and which, for all the ingenious militarism of its organization, has met so often with the final failure of its most ambitious aims.

He was himself too normal and healthy-minded a man not to class the visions of the Jesuit novitiate as aberrations brought about by solitary confinement and an overwrought brain. And the right to one's own conscience, the obligation to follow it, was the

rule upon which he had led his life and done his work as a priest. Yet he knew that it must needs be not a weakling, but a man of strength above the average, who can give up his will to be broken on the wheel of discipline and espionage, and submit it to another so completely that it ceases in the end to exist. And it was that strength — though its results were repulsive to his own uncompromising honesty — which held a powerful attraction for him. It was born of a sense of duty. Men did not live the lives of Jogues, Bressani, or Brébœuf, nor die their deaths, with a meaner motive. And though it might have led, upon the one hand, to the treachery, deceit, and falsehood which has made the name of Jesuitry the synonyme for baseness, on the other it had led to a tale of adventures such as no writer of romance would dare or imagine, of a heroism to the conception of which the poets of early civilizations never reached, a great tragedy of suffering, devotion, bigotry, and self-immolation acted by the light of the fires of human martyrdom against the dark scenery of the mountains and forests of savage new worlds.

It was the tale he was reading now in the volume of a long dead historian whose quaint French might have been anything but easy for one not used to it. But Jean Carmel had read much of the same sort in ancient tomes from the priests' libraries in the cities. He knew the history of his country in all its phases

and in its spirit, that necessary foundation to the thorough knowing of oneself.

"It must have its effect upon the people of to-day that the people of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries founded the nation by the impulse of religion and superstition and adventure," he had said in the earlier evening to Cecily Thorne. "In the stories of your country and mine there is the essential difference that the one was born of intellect, the other of the feelings. Can you imagine the Pilgrim Fathers erecting an altar upon Plymouth Rock, trimming it with flowers, and wreathing it with fireflies, as did the founders of Montreal. It was a waste of time which should have been put to the building of stockades. But it was beautiful, and it had the element of the picturesque which you have lacked."

"We are not all of us typical in this or any other country," he had gone on to set forth his theory. "Perhaps the majority never are. Not all of us contain in ourselves the spirit of the whole. But there must be always a certain number of individuals who do, to an extent—in greater or less degree. Anne, my mother, and myself,"—he made it personal,— "we are the results of Maisonneuve, Le Loutre, Laval, Dollard, Marie de l'Incarnation, and"—he thought of his sister—"even of Marguerite de Roberval. Each one of those is the impersonation of some national trait, traits which the Loyalists and the conquerors

have modified to a great degree, but upon which"—he had smiled over that—"the Americans have had, I think, no influence."

"Our influence," she told him, "may be yet to come." It had stopped there with an appeal of aid from Yvonne, who had been sitting on the floor, the tip of her pink tongue between her teeth, absorbed in the difficulties of cutting out a sheet of paper dolls which had been brought her from up in the States. She had lost all her dread of the strange demoiselle now, and had no hesitation whatever about making use of her.

Later, when he had been left alone, Jean Carmel had gone out to the graveyard, to the mound of earth showing brown and damp yet in the vague light of a quarter-moon behind a hazy sky. Then he had come in and taken the book from the shelf and sat down with it at his desk. It was close upon midnight now, but he kept reading from page to page.

When he stopped at last, he sat looking at a picture in front of him, leaning against the wall. Cecily had brought it to him in memory of an account of one of his own expeditions. It was a small etching, the black surface of some great river, the blacker shadows of the trees on its shore, an Indian standing in his canoe, moving down with the current through the night, and startled by a wild goose flapping suddenly out from the forest. The gleam of a star ray on a

ripple, the dim brave in the canoe, the gray whiteness of the bird, with its neck outstretched—those were all that were not deep darkness. It was the "Solitude," it was named, so tense that one heard shivering through it the wild fowl's harsh squawk. And it was a solitude he himself knew.

Anne opened the door of her room, and he did not hear her. She stood watching him.

She would remember him as he was now in the years to come. In the dark future which was surely ahead for her she would see the circle of lamplight, the broad shoulders in the cassock, the big, browned hand on the open pages of the book, the rough-cut features, the eyes looking from under heavy brows, keen and direct. She would remember him, too, as he had stood before the altar of the church he himself had built, as he had listened with the patience of strength to the garrulous complaints of old men and women, as he had won the confidence of children, as he had entered with real sympathy into the pleasures and sorrows of all the parish,—pleasures and sorrows which had never held great interest for her. There would be so much to remember. He had been her sturdy protector in the time of her troublous childhood, when there had been only two considerations which would withhold her from all the sins of infancy—that she had consented to be put upon her honor, or that she would be hurting Jean.

And after that—he had been her friend, from the

circumstances of her life, the only one. Harnett could never be to her what this brother had been. It would be Jean she would need when troubles should begin to close in, his respect she would want when she should have forfeited any other, and it would be of him she would think when the end of it all should come, when she should be a fallen woman dying unrepentant, and he the priest, going the way of his duties still, saddened somewhat — and quite alone.

Her eyes were burning and her throat ached with the tears she was forcing back. She drew a long, steady-breath. Then she went forward and stood beside the desk. He came out from the night and the forest and looked up astonished. He had supposed her long since asleep. "Well — P'tite Chose?" he queried. Her hand was lying on the edge of the desk. He laid his own upon it, and smiled at her. Gradually the smile went out of his eyes and left them hard and quiet. She had not answered in words, but he had understood what the meaning of it must be, could only be, that the lifelessness of the past year and more was gone. The sense of life, intense and compelling, could be felt in her, the life that is in a fixed idea which knows no other considerations, which has taken to itself the strength of all other thoughts and is an almost visible force. And he had remembered the letter.

She felt the hand that was over hers growing cold. He took it away. She could have thrown her arms

about his neck and have dropped her head upon the shoulders which were bracing to the strain. But she stood where she was and made no movement of any sort.

"He has come back?" he said.

"Yes," she told him.

"And—?" he waited.

"And I am going away with him," she finished it, "not at once, but soon." He knew the uselessness of asking if there were to be even so much as that civil marriage which the church could not recognize as a sacrament, yet which prevented dishonor. Nevertheless he asked it. "He is married," Anne said.

She started back against the wall, a quick, unthinking movement of self-preservation. He looked upon the point of violence. But he had forced himself back into the chair, and he sat with his mouth pressed shut, looking at her, beyond her, where she stood throwing a short, heavy shadow against the boards.

"You have seen him?" he asked, after some time.

"Yes," she answered.

"I warn you," he said, "I shall do my best to find him."

"Do you think," she questioned, "that I should have told you if I had not been sure he was well beyond your reach? By to-morrow he will be hundreds of miles away—in the States."

He was beaten there, and he had no choice but to

accept it, together with the realization that neither she nor Harnett would ever risk the meeting, that they would plan to prevent it, and succeed. She need not have let him know anything, she reminded him now. At first she had determined not to. "Then I thought it over," she said, "and I owed you that much, it seemed to me. I decided that it would be better."

"Yes," he agreed coldly. "It is better—kinder upon the whole." He asked her for the story of Harnett's marriage, and she gave it to him. But he was not moved by it to anything but a contempt he made no effort to hide. It was incomprehensible to him that she should be so utterly incapable of seeing the weakling the man was. "After all," he said, when she had come to the end of it, "stripped of all his self-justification and your sympathy—there remain the bare facts. He could have married you and he did not. And he did not because he valued ease and fortune considerably above you—very considerably."

She shook her head. "Those are the bare facts," she admitted, "but bare facts are no more the truth sometimes than—" she hesitated for a simile—"than bed rock stripped of its covering would be the earth. It is the modification of the facts that is the truth very often." And she tried again, with the persistency she might have put to impressing something upon a child, to make him understand the thing from Harnett's

position and her own. He would only see it that the sacrifice was to be all hers.

"A little cheap melodrama, and easy love-making is all he has to pay—that and the price of keeping you until he shall have done with you. It is you who are to give all the rest, all that you have to give, body and soul and self-respect.

"There is nothing so common and so facile," he told her, "as a love of this man's sort—to tell a woman that you have not been able to keep away from her! If she—if you—could only be made to understand the poor compliment of that! If to have the woman you want is to ruin her—then the best sort of love, it would seem to me, is to keep away from her."

"Ah! the best sort of love"—she said dubiously, "how much of that do you find? And how are you to know that it is not only a cooler sort?"

"At least," he suggested, "you could know that it was not a selfish passion."

All strong passions were selfish, she supposed, without resentment. And she quoted a line from one of his favorite romances: "*Quel est l'amour où il n'y a pas d'égoïsme? Quel est celui d'entre nous qui aime uniquement pour l'objet aimé?*"

He did not answer at once. It took thought to oppose the thought she had given to all this. She was not a woman who kept to sophistries and illusion.

In any one else he would have said that where there was so much reasoning, even faulty and incomplete, there must be less love. But he knew that it was not the case here. A passion that did not shirk argument, but enforced itself with it, was far more difficult to deal with and frustrate than any headlong, inconsequent one.

But the splitting of these abstractions might go on forever. He stopped it. Had she considered, he asked her, the wrong she was doing to Harnett's wife? She was doing her no wrong, she answered. "I am taking nothing she has ever had, or ever wanted. She does not care for him, and she never has. She does not want him to care for her. Both of them understand all that. And I should not do it," she told him, confidently, "if I were breaking another woman's heart."

He could not but believe her. "And the children?" he offered.

She pressed her hands back against the wall and looked at him intractably. "There are no children," she answered.

He frowned angrily. Then he leaned toward her across the desk. "I wonder if you know the effect of this upon *yourself*, upon what has been up to now a fine and honest character?"

She had a quick vision of the short scene with Mathew Thorne here in this same room once before; and he could see that he had struck home. "Oh! I

know," she said disdainfully, "that there is no disgrace for a woman so bitter as to be herself."

He ignored it. "Your nature is deteriorating. It has done so already. In women who have come low there is always the wretched desire to conciliate, and at the same time a smouldering resentment against having to eat the fruit of their own planting. Neither is ennobling. You think you will have a happiness that will keep you above all those miserable, petty things, but the happiness of a woman without the name and rights of a wife—it is that of those who tread their wine-presses and suffer thirst. And it will not last, Anne. The time will come when he will grow tired of you."

"I expect it," she said quietly. She was very white. "There have been cases, I suppose, where it has not followed. But I am not counting on mine to be one of the exceptions. I never have."

"And in that event," he asked, "what will you be?—disreputable, debased, whether he chooses to make you an object of charity or to let you die at the edge of the gutter."

He had pushed back his chair and risen from it, and was walking back and forth across the room. His voice was guarded, not to reach Amélie or Cecily Thorne. He came close to her and stopped.

He believed that she might have shirked the one issue which could admit of no specious self-justification, to defy which was not to show a kind of admiration

compelling courage, but the most despicable of all cowardice.

"If you have no children of the wife's to consider — and if it is only for you and him to decide to bear what you may bring upon yourselves here and hereafter, yet by what right do you inflict upon those who may be brought into the world through you the suffering and blighted life of the illegitimate?" She had nothing to answer.

"That is the most cruel of any of the forms of egoism that such love as yours takes, Anne," he told her, when she stood with her lips pressed together, all that was merely stubborn and self-willed showing, "to entail upon helpless children all that shame and misery and mortification. There is not one single argument by which that can be made to appear other than despicable and unworthy, so despicable and unworthy that it spreads backward and forward over all the rest and makes that equally so."

His own love for children made him feel their dependence as so much an obligation to protect them.

Anne's eyes fell. But it was useless. He saw that it was. "Perhaps that will not follow," was all she had to say. In the unpleasant silence which came after, she lifted her eyes again and saw his face. It had never looked the disapproval that was on it now, and she would far rather have seen anger—anything. She could not meet it. She avoided it uncomfortably. But she was not changed.

There was only one appeal left which he had not yet made, that to sheer Right — the highest of all, yet of small use, he could not but think, against the intense personality it had to meet.

Nevertheless he made it, from the fulness of his heart and conviction. He had never spoken in any sermon as he did now. It was Right for itself that he urged, all finite and temporal and personal considerations aside. She put out her hand at length to check him. "I know all that, Jean. You can't tell me anything that I have not already thought of until I am sick and weary. It is all of no use to talk to me of the higher laws of God. If He has higher and lower ones — then I am following a lower, and a very strong one, and it was the law before those of marriage or the church or even society."

"If his love had been nearly so great as yours," her brother answered, "then marriage and the church and society would all have helped you to have one another. It is because his greed was the greater, that they stand between you."

"Then the greatness of my love must make up for any weakness of his," she said doggedly.

He turned and went over to the open window. A vine was growing around the casing, and a bit of it hung over. He snapped it off and stood, holding it, looking out into the blackness of the midsummer night, in which there was no sound save the little stirring

of some bird in the apple tree outside, and the singing murmur of frogs.

Anne watched him. She would remember him this way, too, in the times ahead, oftenest, if might be, of all—in the deep shadow, his back turned to her, his head down.

He faced about slowly and came back to his chair.

“When the time comes that you want me, P’tite Chose,” he said gently, “will you let me know—or come home to me?” The tears sprang into her eyes on the instant.

But she shook her head determinedly. “It would not be just to you, Jean. When I go, it must be out of your life for good and all. You have every chance for advancement, and it must not be always hanging over you, hampering your future, that a fallen sister may return to you at any time. If you were to stay on in St. Hilaire, it might not matter. But your house-keeper in more important parishes could not be—what I will be.”

He put out his hand to her. She hesitated, then she went up to him, and he drew her nearer. “Listen, Anne,” he said. “It is not as if I could ever forget you—as if I could go on and make for myself the sort of happiness that a man might who could have a wife and children, a family of his own. Except for you, I am alone in the world, quite alone, and I must always be. There will be only one thing left for me to hope of this

world when you are gone. It is that I may some day be of use to you, when others shall have failed, that I may see you—and have you with me again.”

She tried to answer, but he would not let her. He kept on. “The time will come, P’tite Chose, when you will see in the eyes of this man, for whom you are giving everything, that which I have just seen in yours, when you will know as I did a little while ago and without being told it in words, that he has come to say good-by. You will have wished for the big brother who has always been your protector, before that—often, I think, but never as you will wish for him then.”

She had dropped down on her knees beside him and hidden her face against his shoulder, sobbing and holding to him. He put his arm about her firmly, and stroked the hair which showed all its warm gleams in the lamplight. His mouth quivered. But he pressed his lips together and went on. “When that happens, Anne,” he said, bending over her, “will you come back to the one who will be faithful to you, though others fail—to the lonely old Curé who will be waiting for you always in his little presbytère?”

He had never meant to stoop to the selfish plea, to work upon her affection for him. It had always seemed to him that such a course was unfair, almost like taking advantage of some bodily weakness in gaining one’s ends. But he came to it now. For that

picture of the future was before him, and he was seeing the one thing he dreaded most of all,—an abandoned woman, debased and desperate, dying by her own act in her wretchedness and her sin. If he should have been able to save her from nothing else, at least he must have tried every means to prevent that. “It is not for yourself I am asking it,” he whispered to her. “This time it is for the big brother who has always thought more of you than of any one in the world, for the lonely priest—for just myself. Will you promise it—for *me*?” He held her yet closer and his hand still stroked her hair. But it was trembling. He waited with his face near to hers. She was catching her breath, trying to answer him. The one hope left him hung on the word he was listening for.

“Will you come back, little sister?” he repeated. The word would not be spoken yet, but the down-bowed head moved in assent.

CHAPTER XX

It was only the front and sides of the presbytère which were given over exclusively to beauty. The back was devoted to practical usefulness. The barn was there, the cow stable and the store shed. There were also a vegetable garden, fruit trees, and berry vines. The Curé was at work in the vegetable garden, and Amélie Latouche was going back and forth. She did not in the least approve of her master's working among the vegetables. In her opinion it did not become the dignity of his office, and she refused to be converted, even by his argument that the great Champlain himself had had his kitchen patch and toiled in it. Who, in any event, was Champlain? She for one did not know and had no intention of asking.

This morning she was in a bad humor with all the world. And Jean Carmel had observed as much, and drawn conclusions to the effect that it was due to the rough running of the course of an affair of the heart of long standing between herself and the sexton. For a matter of five years, off and on, Amélie had been

going to marry the sexton—aged sixty, and already twice a widower. And something had, time and again, prevented it. The something had been almost invariably the sexton's youngest son, a scapegrace of twenty, who managed to get into financial difficulties with surprising aptness, precisely at the moment that his father had saved enough to make a third matrimonial venture seem feasible. The old man, tender of sentiment toward his last-born, would come to the rescue; his fifteen or twenty dollars would go to pay debts of a sort he himself, always exemplary, had never even in his earliest youth contracted, debts for gambling and for white whiskey. Then the marriage would be postponed. Amélie knew her own worth as a woman, and a breadwinner, and, though a spinster anxious for matronhood, had refused to throw herself away upon a man who had barely the dollar to pay the priest. But of late fortune had appeared propitious. The son had given over evil habits, with a completeness which might have aroused suspicions, baptisms had been so frequent that the sexton had made quite a comfortable sum ringing the bell, and the wedding had consequently been set for the middle of July.

Then, when all had seemed as good as done, the son had frustrated the plans again. This time it was neither gambling nor tavern debts. It was matrimony upon his own account. He had engaged himself to a girl at Les Trembles, and they were to be called for

the first time at the church the next high mass. Love and no higher motive had actuated his reformation, it now transpired. And he threatened that, in the event of his father's refusal to furnish him a decent and seemly sum for a wedding and attendant festivities, he would return to the path of vice and travel it faster. Amélie, consulted in the dilemma, had counselled allowing him to do it promptly and at once, since it was certain that he would, sooner or later, in any case. She was of the opinion of many of greater worldly knowledge, that the devil never yet gave up hopes of a man who was reformed by infatuation for a woman.

But the son was the apple of the sexton's eye, for all that he was a prodigal. "At our age," he had tried to show Amélie, "there is no great haste; at his there is. I must give him this last chance. After that—yes, but this time I will adhere to my word—after that he must shift for himself. The girl is sensible, and not extravagant. She will help him. Then I will save up again; and there should be, at least," he considered, marking off on his fingers, "six more baptisms that I know of, before the winter. We will be married in November, if all goes well." And Amélie had seen her chance at being promoted to a wife recede. She did not fancy that, and decided to forego her avarice.

"Who knows—I may be dead by November," she had explained to the Curé, lugubrious and dissatisfied. "It is

not," she added, "that I am afraid to die more than the next one. But you see for yourself, mon père, that it would look better to be married first. He has not two dollars — yet I will marry him." •

It was one of the sexton's duties to keep the woodpile in the barn replenished with sticks of a suitable size for Amélie's kitchen stove. This morning the sticks were apparently all too large. She swept out the kitchen with her broom of twigs, sorted the potatoes in the store shed, then came and complained of the wood. "I can't burn logs the size of those, in my stove," she said.

Monsieur Carmel was training some strong-smelling tomato vines, and he went on with his work. "Théophile ought to be somewhere around the church," he suggested equably. Théophile was the too paternal suitor.

Amélie, standing under a big sunflower, her hands on her hips, her enormous brimmed hat on over her nightcap, sneered. Théophile! — he never attended to his duties properly. The wood was always too big; besides, he was not around the church, he was probably off with his worthless son. If there was no small wood, there could be no midday dinner, that was all.

The Curé left his tomato vines. "We must have dinner — evidently," he said good-humoredly. He went into the woodshed, picked up the axe, and split several armfuls of pieces.

Amélie stood in the doorway and looked on, considerably disconcerted. It was not meet that a priest should perform the neglected work of a beadle, she opined grumblingly. She had not meant m'sieu to do that.

"As a matter of fact," he told her, putting by the axe, "I am inclined to think that any one of the sticks would have gone into the stove, without much trouble;" and he met her injured and indignant protestations to the contrary with a smile.

He went back to his vegetable garden, and worked at it for some time longer, in pursuance of a formed determination to be with Cecily Thorne no more often than civility required.

It was not until almost an hour later that he came round from the kitchen patch, through a path between the blackberry bushes, carrying a big wooden bowl full of radishes, tomatoes, and lettuce. He stopped, and stood looking at what was going on in the flower garden. Mathew Thorne was doing a much-discussed sketch in oils. He had put up his easel in the shade of one of the church elms, and had, with admirable obliviousness of what effect the sun he himself was avoiding might have upon Anne, posed her in the midst of two beds of poppies, which were Monsieur Carmel's pride. The poppies were great, flaming scarlet ones on furry stems, black-stained at their fierce, hot hearts. Two of them, wide-opened to falling, were in Anne's hands, and

one, with a green seed-pod, drooped on her hair. Her face was colorless, and her eyes heavy. It did not heighten her beauty perhaps, but it added suggestion to the pose.

Thorne glanced up from his block. He took in the effect of the priest's cassock, the bowl of garden stuff, and the mortar and stone wall of the house. When he should have finished the sister, he called, it might be well to do the brother as "The Curé's Salad," or "The Earth's Increase." He had a feeling at once that the flippancy had been a little ill advised. Jean Carmel had walked over to the porch and set down the bowl, without replying. Thorne, with a sudden realization that a priest's robe in conjunction with an armful of vegetables did not preclude dignity, cast a sidewise look at his cousin, who was leaning against the fence near him, watching progress. His brows raised. Her face had flushed with plain annoyance, and the color deepened under his quizzical scrutiny. "A blush," he commented, in a dropped voice, meant for only her ears, "like the scarlet flag of Jeanne d'Arc at Rouen, shows sometimes where there is weakness in the walls."

Jean Carmel, dusting the soil from his hands and cassock, came over and took up his place back of Thorne. Whatever his opinion of the man,—and it was not extravagantly high,—there could be no question as to the ability of the artist. The effect of the

upward reflection of the scarlet flowers upon the dead paleness of the skin was managed with admirable technique. And there was the heat of midsummer noon beating in the atmosphere.

He had grave doubts as to the advisability of Anne's standing for so long in the full sun. The strain of the day and night before had been heavy enough upon her, as it was. To him she showed it cruelly. And it must be evident, he thought, to Thorne, since the look had been caught exactly in the sketch. He was inclined to resent it that Anne's unhappiness should be laid bare to speculation. But Thorne had that species of egoism which connects all things, in one way or another, with itself. He had taken due note of Anne's abstraction. But he had set it down to continuing resentment of the episode of the year before, and reflected upon the manifest advantages of worldly training, which enabled himself to ignore that unfortunate mischance as entirely as if it had never taken place. The same training in Anne Carmel, he could not but think, would have added to the general comfort—his own in particular. As it was, he was made to feel a trifle like the villain of melodrama who has insulted helpless innocence. It bordered the mock-heroic and absurd, and was, moreover, hardly fair, all things considered. Since he was ready to forget, to all intents and purposes, her own not too creditable history, she might have had the

grace to do the same by his one very natural misinterpretation thereof.

Cecily Thorne had gone away to the corner of the garden under the apple tree. Jean Carmel crossed over to her. Yvonne's dolls were lying in a chair. He took them up and sat down, putting them across his knees, with a complete lack of any self-consciousness which might have suggested to another man that a muscular young priest, with two large, badly damaged, and untidy dolls, stretched in his lap in attitudes of limp, despairing abandonment, was, to say the least of it, quaint. The chair was close to Cecily. He settled back into it and absently took the arm of one of the dolls between his thumb and finger, moving it up and down. He still watched Anne, where she stood in the midst of the poppies. Next year, when the poppies should come again, burning out in the summer heat, she would not be there—nor the year after, nor for years to come, if ever. It might be better, upon the whole, to let the garden go, do the best it could alone, growing over gradually with the weeds and grasses and blackberry vines. He could put his time to other things,—study, the work of the parish, and the hunting and fishing and canoeing which were better for loneliness—the things in which one might forget the need of women in the world. A garden presupposed a woman—since the one eastward in Eden. The poppies without Anne would lose half their glory. He had

always connected her with them, as he did the spring daffodils —

He turned to Cecily Thorne. "When you shall be a world-known singer," he said, "and shall come back one day to visit the spot you once knew for a few short days of your youth, you will knock at the door of the presbytère, and it will be opened by a big, bent, gray-haired priest, his life waxen old with heaviness. His sight will not be what it had been, but when you shall have told him who you are, he will be glad to see you. And he will take you out among the weeds of the yard, and remind you where were the daffodils the first time you came into the garden. He will point out where the great poppies were among which his sister stood, on a summer's day —" He stopped abruptly and laughed it off. "I beg your pardon," he said.

She called to Yvonne's collie, which had come up along the path. "Voyons Dagobert," she said to him, taking his head into her lap. "When we come back, will you know us too—or will you bark and try to bite?"

"He will be long since dead," said Jean Carmel, shortly. And his voice was rude.

In the awkward pause that followed he looked straight ahead of him, his eyes more direct and stern than commonly. Dagobert licked Cecily's fingers.

He had come into the garden with his mistress and Etienne Coppée. And the two children were following

him; Yvonne in advance, Etienne dutifully behind. They had painstakingly avoided Mathew Thorne's neighborhood. Yvonne's terror of him was not to be overcome. The memory of the rainy day and of his laugh and comment from the tavern door, refused to be eradicated. She looked with uncomprehending puzzlement at Anne, standing so still in the sun, hatless, and with poppies in her hands and hair. It was a most extraordinary and inexplicable proceeding. "What is she doing?" she asked of Miss Thorne. Cecily explained. "Oh!" said Yvonne slowly, as the idea worked itself into her brain. And what had she herself been doing, Cecily asked. "Buying groceries," she replied, with all the solemnity of a plump housemistress. "Show them, Etienne."

Etienne carried a newspaper bundle of small proportions. He came up and opened it, displaying the contents, four fancy crackers, some candy gooseberries, and a burnt almond, also a few coffee beans — representing the purchasing power of a ten-cent piece which Cecily had contributed toward the domestic funds. It was for dinner, Etienne explained, twisting up the top of the paper tightly again. "We went to the pasture to milk the cow," said Etienne, who had the confessing habit to a troublesome degree, together with the trait of his first father, of dragging the woman in. "And Yvonne left the gate open, and the cow got out. And Théophile is chasing her."

He waited for Monsieur Carmel's remarks, but none were forthcoming. Monsieur did not seem to have listened. "Come on," said Yvonne, not approving the trend of Etienne's conversation, and desirous of changing the subject, "we must cook dinner." Then she bethought herself of their family. She glanced at the chair in which the Curé sat, an expression of intense indignation coming over her rubicund countenance. It died out. She saw the dolls on his lap. He was not sitting on them, after all. She made a grab for them. But he was too quick. One in each hand he held them high above his head. Yvonne reached fruitlessly. She climbed upon the rungs of the chair and reached again. Then she hung her whole very creditable weight on the arm, and tried to pull it down.

The limb of a tree had not been more firm. "Give them to me," she demanded, "give them to me. They must have their dinner." She was panting with exertion. "Etienne," she called. Masculine assistance was desirable on occasions; in such a crisis as this, for instance. "Etienne, come and help." But Monsieur Carmel was the Curé, and not to be climbed over and battered even when he chose to descend from his lofty dignity to tease. Etienne failed his helpmeet in the emergency.

She looked at him with contempt beyond mere inadequate speech. "I won't be married to you any more,"

she said, and turned on her heel and walked away, over to the back of the garden, near the latticed cellar door, where their house was an old shawl stretched from the edge of the well to a tree.

Etienne, divorced by a process of more than Mosaic simplicity, stood hesitating, looking dejectedly after her. The Curé repented and took pity upon him. "This is not sufficient cause for separation," he said to Cecily. "I will have to mediate. There are disadvantages in living under the roof of an heiress." He took Etienne by the hand, and, carrying the dolls carefully, went toward the playhouse, under the shadow of which Yvonne sat, with her back resolutely turned.

The matter was, in the end, satisfactorily arranged for all parties, the wife placated, the husband reinstated in favor, and the children rendered up to their legal owners.

Jean Carmel did not go back to his place under the wide-branched apple tree again.

CHAPTER XXI

THERE is a class of charity among those so situated in the world that they have little other to dispense, which ceases in the ranks of those esteemed more fortunate, and who, with the comfortable philosophy of Zacchæus, stand forth and say unto the Lord that, having given half their goods to the poor, if they have done any wrong to any man, they thereby restore fourfold. It is that charity which covers sins and is ready to ignore them, to give the sinner a new chance, a fresh start, a clean sheet for the writing of his future life.

Anne Carmel had outlived her disgrace in the parish, and the past was not generally remembered against her. She was to marry a respectable man and begin over fairly. And it was not deemed necessary to the maintenance of a standard of virtue to recall by-gones persistently. The drawing away from her neighborhood and watching her askance had some time since ceased.

Two days after she had met Harnett in the deserted log hut, it began again. It was a Sunday, and the assembling for high mass meant always the spreading

of gossip. A habitant on an outlying farm had seen Harnett riding upon a sorry beast toward St. Hilaire. Another knew that he had stayed over night in the next parish, in the tavern at Les Trembles.

In the open space near the church, where they tied their buggies and charettes, they told it to shifting groups. One bit of information attracted another and dovetailed with it. There was Antoine's account of the closed door at Séailles' cabin. Coppée had insisted that it had been left unbarred, as indeed it was obliged to be, since the bars could only be dropped from within. And Madame Gerard's mother had met Mademoiselle Carmel coming from the direction of the cabin rather after noon, on Friday, her gray eyes shining vaguely and seeming to see nothing, her face like that of some one who might have encountered a loup-garrou.

Anne, waiting for Cecily Thorne by the church entrance, saw a lot of habitants glancing toward her covertly. She had not expected it. She grew cold and trembled nervously. But she showed the same indifferent front with which she had faced the same thing before.

Only before the indifference had been genuine. Now it was not. In that rebelliousness against having to eat the fruit of her own deeds which her brother had foretold, she felt a bitter dislike of them all for a set of persecuting Pharisees, and an angry satisfaction that she would soon outrage their narrow sense of the pro-

prieties more flagrantly yet—since there are, illogically enough, none so resentful against the public opinion which dares to judge them unfavorably as those same ones who have, in the beginning, flouted and disdained it. What right had they to judge of her actions? And how did they know of them in any case? Who had found out the meeting in the cabin, and been busybody enough to spread it? When Antoine had pressed his face against the window, had he seen more than he had seemed to? And under all her indignation she was uneasily conscious of that very deterioration which Jean had warned her of. Chafing and fretting against what she had brought on herself, vindictive annoyance with those who showed themselves inclined to keep aloof, were not motives having any dignity, and she knew it.

She stood her ground until Cecily arrived. Then they went into the church.

Paul Tetrault had been in one of the groups at the hitching rails. After the mass he did not meet Anne, as was his custom. He could not help believing that the story was true, that Harnett was back and that Anne had seen him. He was hurt and angry at the treachery, though he still refused to accept any doubts of her virtue. But he was more than a little afraid to face Anne alone. He wanted backing. And he went for it to the Curé. Jean Carmel would surely recognize that he, Paul Tetrault, had been badly

treated, and would sympathize with him, and join him in condemning Anne's behavior.

Monsieur Carmel was in the sacristy, and Tetrault asked to speak to him alone. There were a couple of acolytes lingering. "Make haste!" the priest told them, more curtly than was his habit. He closed the door after them. Then he turned back to Tetrault. "Yes?" he said. It was hardly the tone of sympathy. He had never showed the friendliness that was surely to be expected from a prospective brother-in-law. Nevertheless, Paul adhered to his purpose.

There was talk of a very unpleasant sort in the parish, he began. No helping interrogation followed. He kept on, uncomfortably. The Englishman, Harnett, had been seen in the neighborhood — on Friday — and had slept at Les Trembles on Thursday night.

The surprise and wrath upon which he had counted failed to be manifested. There was still the discouraging silence. Had Jean Carmel known it? he asked. Yes, he had known it. And that Anne was said to have met the man at Séailles' cabin?

The priest stood looking at him. "I should advise you," he said, "to go directly to Anne. It is not necessary to come to me for information — nor for assistance."

Tetrault's easy blush surged over his face. He stammered an unhappy apology. "It is due to my sister," Jean Carmel answered, and busied himself with the vestments he had just taken off, folding his stole.

By what code of common sense or even chivalry apologies should be due to Anne under the circumstances, was very much beyond Paul's understanding. It was true, what was said of the Curé, that his attitude toward his sister and that which he exacted from others was not reasonable. It was absurd to demand, for a woman who had put herself in Anne's position, considerably more deference than was customarily acknowledged as the due of even the most entirely blameless. He was angry and conscious of being undeservedly ill used.

And Anne admitted his justification. She offered none for herself—a humility in which there was yet no self-abasement. That, in the end, was all upon Tetrault's side. He fell on his knees in front of her chair, clinging to her hands, the tears running down his plump cheeks, pleading with her. If she would send Harnett away, even if she were not ready to marry himself now, he would wait, wait as long as she might choose. She shrank with disgust, a mental and physical aversion. She could have struck him off, and she loathed her own flesh because he was touching her; but she forced herself to be kind. It was her punishment for the harm she had done him in sheer selfishness, and she made herself take it without visible flinching.

"It is no use, Paul," she told him. "You have been good to me—when no one else, except my brother,

was. And you believed in me against everything. You have stood a great deal for me. I know it. And I will remember it. But—you *must* understand me. If I were never to see him again, if he were to die to-morrow, I know now that I could never marry you."

He dropped his forehead upon her lap. She was cruel to him, he moaned—cruel.

Her nerves were creeping. But she raised his head and looked into his swimming eyes. "There are a great many wrongs that I have done you and myself, Paul," she said. "But believe this—the greatest to both was when I meant to marry you."

When he had accepted it at last, and was going, he stopped with his hand on the door, hesitating. Then he brought the question out. Was she going away with—the other? With such gentleness as she could bring to it, she reminded him that they had no longer the right to require one another's confidences. He went down the garden, openly mopping his eyes.

Anne stood where he had left her, shivering audibly, her muscles quivering, her fingers twisted together and strained.

In the late afternoon the village was still almost as full as it had been in the morning. It was known that Cecily Thorne was to sing at vespers, and it had spread abroad that she had fame in her own land. Tetrault and his wife drove in.

Madame Tetrault's whole figure told of satisfaction

and triumph. She collected a half-dozen friends and took up her stand close to the door of the church, her husband beside her. Anne, coming with Cecily Thorne through the front gate of the presbytère and up the church steps, passed her, of necessity, within a few feet. Madame's voice became painstakingly audible. "Yes," she was telling it, "Paul heard this morning that the Englishman had returned, and had been meeting Mademoiselle Carmel in Séailles' cabin. And, of course, he was obliged to refuse to marry her."

Anne's face went the color of the stone of the church, as gray and as hard. But Cecily Thorne might have heard nothing of more import than the first squeaky, wheezy notes of the organ to which she was to sing. She went on up to the loft from whence they came, and Anne passed into the church alone.

Neither the organ nor the choir at St. Hilaire were such as to afford satisfaction or pride to Jean Carmel, whose appreciation of melody was, nevertheless, as can happen with those yet quite devoid of any ability to produce it, the most deep and sensuous.

The soprano was one whose voice proved that not every Canadian village could produce its Albani.

Cecily, from her place high up at the back of the building, looked down over the congregation, square-built mothers and daughters, lost to even the picturesque in their Sunday costumes, grandmothers whose youth had known field work and whose shoulders

were too much bent, fathers and sons, ungainly in their best suits and hats, and grandfathers, quaint in ill-fitting homespun. Anne was in shadow, close to a pillar, kneeling, the beads passing through her fingers. The acolytes had come in from the sacristy door to the right of the chancel, bearing each a wax candle, the flames of which streamed backward in the pale daylight. The altar of Mary was elaborate in laces and ornaments and flowers. And the priest in his golden robes stood before the golden main altar, in the midst of the flickering lights. There was much in this church, Cecily could not but think, to appeal to emotional, earthly, and fallible man, because of those very qualities in itself—compromises, they might be, with the less high, but making it the truer to human nature for that, and so the better able to appeal to it, the better understood by it. There was much asked of the heart and soul of these faithful peasants, nothing of their intellect. The latter was rather to be lulled to sleep, making the faith a haven of repose, which the more exacting Protestant ones could never be.

There came back to her the memory of her speculations, the day she had watched him in the meadow by the river, under the new-leafing oak tree. Had any woman, kneeling down there in the church, pressed together, in prayer, fingers which in her thoughts were touching the brown hair of the bending head?

The harsh little organ was complaining a prelude. The tenor opened her music and held it out to her. And to Jean Carmel there floated down the same voice he had heard once before as he had waited, listening, in the cold pink stillness of a new day.

But now the soft notes were rich in the sonorous Latin, and swelled and fell without a break, —swelled and fell and rose again.

The little thurifer swung his silver censer ; the glittering Host was exposed before the congregation, set on high ; the incense smoked, shimmering and iridescent in the light of the candles, up to the painted images above the altar ; the one mellow voice soared out in the triumph of its song, — while the sun fell through a window, across the chancel, and full on the priest, his head bowed, his soul and senses thrilled with the beauty of sound.

He came to her afterward, when the villagers had gone on their ways at last, their minds diverted for the nonce from the Curé's sister to his guest. She was wandering in the high-walled churchyard, through the thick grass and violet plants, looking at the headstones, greened and damp with moss, and the black crosses, little and tall, of wood or iron. "Ici-git, Ici-repose, Priez pour lui"—the names and the dates.

And when all was said and done, it mattered so slightly whether the dates were close together or well apart. Even the last-named year on some of the de-

faced older stones was quite a time away, and the rank grass and thick violet leaves were straggling where had been a mound, and now was only a sinking of the earth. Those were the dead, forgotten and out of mind. And not only they. Others, over whose low-lying heads only a few seasons had passed, were no more remembered, though there still lived some in whose lives they had closely shared. Whether or no it had been the fault of themselves, their places must have been soon filled. The flowers on their graves were brown sheaves, or dried stems in some old, cracked goblet or jug. Or perhaps a red earthenware pot was broken apart, showing worthless roots. They were more dreary, those, than the hollows beneath the toppling slabs.

"There is one who has not been forgotten," Jean Carmel said to her. He took her to the corner near the high-arched gate and pointed out a stone. "It was here," he told her, "before I built the church. A good many of the graves were; it was the burying place then." There was only one name on the stone—Pierrot, and the dates beneath it were but four years apart, to the day. He gave her the story.

Pierrot had been the little son of a woman who had lived here on her terre among the forests, before the village had come to be, and he had died almost half a century before. Yet twice every week in all that time, winter and summer, the mother had toiled here from

the patch of land she called her farm. She was a very old woman now, a grandmother; but her dead was not out of mind. In winter the snow was always scraped off from this one grave; in summer the withered arms still swung the scythe which cut down the grass, and the flowers were always new. He stood, considering the little well-tended oblong of ground. "The case could never have been reversed," he said slowly. "It could never be a child who would remember so long. With the animals filial affection does not exist; and with us it is a cultivated sentiment, not an inherent one. It is the divine plan, it seems, for love to flow, not backward, but on." He turned sharply away, throwing back his head. "And the priest of the church must frustrate it at its source," he said. But it was between his teeth, and she did not hear.

The whole family of the Gerards had come in through the stone gateway, and madame carried a bunch of marguerites to lay on her father's grave. Cécile preceded her, with a tiny bunch of her own. Jean Carmel went toward them and stood talking. He bent over and held out his hand to the child. She put her's gravely into it. Then they kept on. But Cécile stopped short upon a sudden, and turned up to her mother a cherub face, in a mist of flaxen hair. "Why —" she asked, and the childish treble of her lisp carried far — "why does M'sieu' le Curé call me sometimes — Ce-cie-lie?"

CHAPTER XXII

THE big scarlet poppies were not the only ones in the presbytère garden. By the other side of the house there was a long, narrow bed of more delicate ones, pink and crimson and white, on slender stems, needing much care and the finest weather, both of which they had had. They were just beneath the window of Cecily's room, and in the misty gray of the early morning she put back the cumbersome, solid shutter, and leaned out, looking down at them — the results of the package of seeds which she herself had sent.

The breeze was still lost in the soft cloud fleece, and the air was full of a fine vapor, clinging to everything, frosting the leaves of the vines, and making the poppies hang down limp and dripping heads. Then there came the first soft gust of south wind, and they tossed about, opening, nodding to the scattering river fog and to the bits of faintly blue sky which began to show.

She had reached out and snapped off a gauzy white one. It had been coldly colorless until the sun had touched it, then it had seemed to quiver through all its petals, showing the yellow of the stamens, and lights

like the fire of opals, shimmering pink stains, blue and amber gleams, chill tints, dainty and elusive as those of dawn.

Cecily felt that some one was watching her. It was Jean Carmel. He had come to within a few feet, along the grass at the edge of the gravel path, and had stopped there, watching how the sun which had brought rainbow hues into the poppy had glinted through the pale hair of the head framed in the window casing and the drooping pink honeysuckle vine.

He had broken a crimson rose from one of the bushes at the front of the house, and he went over now and reached it out to her across the multicolored bed. "This," he said, "will keep its beauty — whether in sun or shadow. It will send out its sweetness even when it is dying, and afterward the petals can be kept and will give out their perfume still. But that poppy — take it from the sunshine, and its beauty is gone at once. It will last but a little time at the best. Then you will find a thin, wisp of stem, with a halo of yellow rays. The petals will be lying shrivelled on the floor, fit for nothing but to be thrown away."

"And the key to the parable?" she inquired.

"The key to the parable — the which is spontaneous, by the bye, upon the inspiration of the moment, and most creditable too for half after six o'clock — the key is this: that the rose is for those whose beauty is from within, and whose soul sends out

its own influence ; the poppy, for those whose life must come all from without, and who are only lovely in the sunlight of happiness. Some day," he finished, with an air of much satisfaction, "I shall incorporate that in a sermon — as a flower of speech."

The sexton came around from the front. He was in garments of ceremony and carried white cotton gloves. Monday and the mass being the preferred time for weddings, he was to be married that morning to Amélie Latouche. And there was to follow festivity — with Coppée to furnish music for dancing in the one-room cottage which was the sexton's abode, and would henceforth be Amélie's, save during the day, when she would continue to work for Père Carmel.

The sexton had arrangements to make with m'sieu', who went off with him, returned for breakfast after the ceremony, and took his departure again immediately.

Amélie being, in consideration of the event, excused from domestic duties for the day, those fell upon Anne, who, believing that, though an heiress, Yvonne should nevertheless learn to become a house-mistress, had pressed that sturdy small damsel into service.

Cecily sat in the garden reading for a while. Then she started off into the woods.

About a third of a league from the village, and beside a path which led more directly than the road to the Tetrault farm, there was a small lake where the water-lilies and iris grew thickly, and were, as a

general thing, left severely alone by the utilitarian habitant. Cecily meant to gather some of the lilies for Anne, reaching from the bank or going out on jutting stones ; but it was still too soon to go directly back with them. She went in among the trees, and lay down on a grassy slope in a little open space, her hands clasped under her head, looking indolently up through her lashes at the branches far against the blue sky, watching the drifting over of occasional gray-edged clouds.

The usual safety of hill districts was enhanced by the generally law-abiding character of the people, and there was little to fear from the molestation of either man or beast. Nevertheless, when, after a time, she heard the faint crackling of the bushes, she raised herself quickly, and her hand went to the pocket which always held a tiny revolver.

It was only, however, Jean Carmel, coming along the path, through the isle of trees, and still some distance away in the flickering sunshine and shade. He walked with the movements of the woodsman, but he had not just then the woodsman's roving eye, which misses no signs or tracks. He was looking directly down the path as he came on, and, until Cecily spoke to him, did not see her. He glanced around quickly, taken unprepared and stopping short. Then, with the air of one who gives up the effort against contrary Fate, and has no choice left him but to make the best

of a situation, he turned aside, and sat down at a little distance from her, on a fallen trunk. He had been, he explained, to see a parishioner, who, being ill and repentant, had sent for him. "It was a trivial matter. I have noticed that there is usually most to-do over little sins. Those sting the conscience, I suppose. The larger stun it, probably."

She looked at him speculatively, biting at the tender white root of a blade of grass she had pulled. And, almost without her own intention, there passed her lips the question she had never yet asked, either of him or Anne—how it had come about that he had chosen the priesthood for his life-work.

It was not in the least the story of fervent impulse and vocation admitting of no refusal, and neither was it that of the self-deception she had more than half expected. To her Protestant mind, trained in the midst of totally different conditions from the almost mediæval ones among which Jean Carmel had grown up, it was perplexing that a man completely honest with himself could hold the doctrines he did in all sincerity. But the tale was a very commonplace one of the choice of an occupation, guided by the wishes of parents who had planned it for him, even before his birth and from his childhood on, kept the end in view. As prosaic a matter, upon the whole, she concluded, as the taking of orders by the average English cleric. The family of a priest here, he ex-

plained to her, was bound to be respectable, and the calling itself was looked upon as creditable. Perhaps too frequently, also, it was looked upon as a means of making a better income than some of them would otherwise be likely to. But, in his own case, there had not been that motive. "Until just before I came to this parish," he said simply, "we were by no means poor." And his grandfather, he told her, was still a rich man,— "who holds out to me," he added, "by way of inducement to forsake my present walk of life for that of other men, offers of a worldly sort not to be scorned." He was apparently willing to talk of himself and his affairs now, and as a rule he was distinctly taciturn upon the subject. Had he ever, she asked him, thought of accepting the offer? He snapped a twig from the trunk and tossed it over at the lake. "Yes," he said, "I have thought of it." The tone by no means encouraged her to ask further. She sat, bending forward, with her chin in her hand, seeing the lush stretch of moving brake in the distance of the woods.

As a rule he was a man of long silences, given to reserve, but he spoke now as one who wanted speech upon any terms, and he brought it with a question of his own, intended as an audible barrier to his own thoughts, a plain reminder to himself of the actual conditions which separated him from her. When, he asked, was she to be married? She did not change

her position or turn her eyes to him. "I am not to be married," she said. "I decided it — some time ago."

A cedar-bird flew slowly away from above their heads, showing the flecks of crimson under the wings, and dropped down into the thicket, misty in the distance of little straight trunks, dead branches, and gray hanging moss. There was the crisp, dry rustle of the glittering-leaved aspens by the edge of the pond where the lilies stirred in a breeze. A chipmunk came out on the limb of a fluffy stone pine, rough with lichen. It looked down, twinkling its eyes, then, switching its tail behind its head, sat up and scolded squeakily.

Jean Carmel had got to his feet. "It must be near noon," he said, sighting the sun. And he waited for her to rise. He made no offer to help her. They went down to the path, and he stood aside to let her pass. It was too narrow for them to walk side by side. She went on, without speaking, feeling that he was just behind, and that his eyes were on her. Against her will she turned her head and looked up at him. "The poppy in your hair is dead," he said. His voice was being controlled. She gave a nervous half-laugh, and, taking the flower out, let it drop from unsteady fingers. It touched a big spray of bracken, and all the wilted white petals fell off. A breath of wind puffed them away.

As she walked on in front of him she could see one of his hands. It was strained shut until the knuckles

showed livid through the brown. One of the heavy clouds which had been in the sky all the forenoon had hidden the sun. It passed, and the whole forest burst into light, glinting far off among the trunks, bringing out a white or silver birch, or a burnished red cherry, touching a pine to bright green, and spreading over the soft sea of brake.

The shimmering film of a big, drifting cobweb floated down and settled upon her hair and face. It clung in her lashes, blinding and dazzling her. She tripped on an uncovered root, and threw out her hand. It touched another, and was caught — and held.

CHAPTER XXIII

PAUL TETRAULT had been on his way home for the midday dinner. He had taken neither the road nor the path, but had kept near the latter among the big rocks along the edge of the hill, just above, where there was always twilight, even at noon, where the dew was never dry on the leaves of the little pale plants — the bunch-berries and jacks and lilies that came up sparsely in the shade. Looking down, his eyes had caught a glint of tan which was not that of the sunlight on the dry pine drift.

It moved, and he thought it must be some woman's dress, Cecily Thorne's most probably. And for no other reason than that he was not in haste, and felt idly inclined to make sure, he turned a little aside and went nearer down through the shadow, where his footsteps made no noise on the springy depths of moss and needles and mould. He stopped abruptly. It was not only Cecily Thorne in the sun-flooded space of the pathway. It was Monsieur Carmel as well. He moved over to a tree, and, leaning against it, folded his arms on his chest, deliberately watching. His

eyebrows were raised knowingly, and he nodded his head at intervals, with that satisfaction which one finds in seeing one's worst beliefs or prophecies justified, deriving, upon the whole, more contentment from that than from the keeping of a faith or an ideal. He had hinted of this to Anne, and she had shrivelled his very soul with one look. And, moreover, Jean Carmel had indubitably behaved toward him in a way that had been anything but encouraging, during all the time of his engagement.

Nevertheless, it was a good impulse which, as soon as the two in the path below had gone on, started him back to the village, by the way he had come. Anne, the only one who could possibly avert evil, ought to be warned. It was to warn her that he was going — until he was almost at the presbytère it was only that. Then another thought came to him, mixing the motives. He had been hurrying by short cuts ; but the startling possibilities struck him still and gasping, the possibilities that would lie in making the right use of what he had just seen. Told abroad — told even into one well-chosen ear, his mother's, for instance, — it would mean the disgracing of Jean Carmel in the parish and farther. But he would not tell it. He would keep it to himself, now and always, on one condition — that Anne should marry him.

It would lie with her to buy his silence and her brother's honor. And she would pay the price he meant

to ask. As to that he had no doubts. Of the legitimacy of such methods of compulsion he had, however. But he allayed those sufficiently well. Was he not saving her from Harnett and ruin, saving her name and soul? He was even able to work himself to a frame of mind closely approaching virtuous self-satisfaction over this phase of it.

His love for Anne had changed its character from the self-abnegating affection of the past. Then she had been the young girl whom he revered from afar, humbly conscious of her manifold superiorities. Now she was a woman, wholly of the earth in her temptations and faults, wholly of the flesh in her hold on him. She had come too near to being his wife to make giving her up a mere matter of foregoing a sentiment. He wanted her now, and in any way that he could get her.

He not only hurried on to the presbytère. He ran.

Yvonne was the only one in the house. She was in the kitchen. When he asked for Anne she stared at him because he was breathless. Then gradually she pointed to the barn, with a big spoon, all purple and dripping with the juice of some stewing prunes she had just stirred. And, suddenly observing the syrupy drops on the floor, she put the spoon back in the pot, and, falling on her knees, began to wipe them up with the big gingham apron of Anne's which was tied around her neck and hung to the ground.

Tetrault went out to the barn. It was not only the woodshed and the old sorrel's stable; it was also the favorite laying place of the chickens.

Anne had gone out to hunt for eggs; and Antoine, having come slouching aimlessly in, had been told to climb in back of a pile of wood and a diminished stack of last year's hay, to help in the search. He was not visible when Paul appeared in the wide doorway. To all seeming Anne was alone. She looked her astonishment at seeing him at all, and that with a flushed and agitated face, the perspiration trickling over it from his damp curls. Then she had a quick fear. Was it Jean — had anything happened to her brother?

Yes, it was Jean, he said meaningly. He put out his hand and pushed her back. Monsieur Carmel was not hurt — neither in danger. And he did not keep her in suspense. He was by no means anxious to have the Curé and Miss Thorne, nor any one else, for that matter, arrive upon the scene before he should have brought things to where he wanted them. Anne had no time to warn him of Antoine and cut him off. He had come out, in a dozen words that tripped one other in their haste, with what he had seen in the path — no more, to be sure, than would have been right and proper and even desirable between all other young men and maidens, but was clearly, here, an evil and a shameful thing.

He had gone near to Anne and closed his coarse

fingers on her wrist, with the tyranny of a small will given power. She jerked herself free, but she shrank a little too. Antoine came clambering over the haystack, carrying with utmost care his remains of a straw hat — three eggs inside the crown. There was nothing in his face by which to judge how much or how little he had heard. His was no habitant density, but the quickness of Irishman and Indian combined. And, without demur, he obeyed Anne's suggestion that he should take the eggs in to Yvonne — going forthwith.

He returned also, but neither Anne nor Paul knew that. He was fairly well hidden behind the cow shed, and his ear and his eye were alternately pressed to a knothole most advantageously located for his purposes. He heard Tetrault make his proposition, setting forth the wisdom of accepting it out of hand, concisely and with small pains to pick pleasant words. Anne should promise to marry him, then and there, or the parish should learn his story.

Antoine, not hearing anything further at once, used his eye. There was nothing to be seen but Tetrault waiting, with plain impatience, casting a glance out of the door from time to time, and Anne, standing still, twisting a breastpin on the front of her gown. Her lips moved, and Antoine listened again. It seemed that she had expressed doubts of the story. Tetrault laughed rudely. "It is true," he said. "And you know it is. So will all the parish, if I tell it. They



"She accepted it all quietly, making no useless protestations or complaints."

have wondered why the girl came back. They will find this the explanation." He held the whip and was cracking it over her. He specified conditions. With fine instinct for his own safety — her brother was to know nothing of the cause of her changed decision. And, with equal astuteness — she was not to see Harnett at all again. She might write, once only, but he himself was to first read the letter. She accepted it all quietly, making no useless protestations or complaints.

And in reward for her docility he deigned to give his consent to her one request, that for a week he should keep the renewed engagement to himself. He was not loath to do that, in any case, since the evil hour with his parents would be postponed thereby.

He made her seal the barter with a kiss. Then he went. Antoine went, too, but by the back gate.

And Anne stood where she was, in the half-gloom of the quiet barn. The wide-open door showed the pulsing sunlight, the pigeons moving about on the ground, Pilote asleep with her nose between her paws, and two new little chickens hopping over her back and head, investigating, and inquiringly pecking at her hair without disturbing her. She was conscious of all that, and of the murmuring heat song of the dusting hens, keeping up steadily and incessantly. In some distant yard another hen was cackling with insistence, and a calf somewhere, was baaing for its mother. The bees who had been told off from the hive to keep it cool that day were buzzing

steadily by the opening, making a tiny draught and an even droning sound with their hard-working wings.

She went slowly over to the empty stall and laid her arm upon the edge, bowing her head on it. She was very still. A pigeon came waddling upon its thin red legs, crossing the rough floor, picking some stray bits of white and yellow corn, at the very edge of her skirt. Once she looked up and stared blindly at the line of light showing through a crack in the boards in front of her. Then her head went down again, moving from side to side in the restlessness of suffering.

She heard Jean's voice calling to her, and she straightened herself, resolutely gathering courage. He was coming toward the barn, looking for her. It was incredible, the power of expressing nothing, of the human face and eyes. In his there was not a trace of emotion of any sort, — happiness, or trouble, or shame. She could almost have doubted Tetrault, yet her brother substantiated the story in so far as to say that he had come by the lake path and had met Cecily. And there was a bit of thin silver chain showing against Cecily's neck. Paul had said that she had drawn forth a little silver cross and showed it to Jean, and Anne had recalled that it was long since she had seen the 'Gray Nun's cross. The poppy was not in the pale hair. Paul had told her how it had been taken out and dropped.

Yet they spoke, the three of them, of Amélie's wed-

ding dance, which had been going on all the morning. And there came over Anne the dazing sense of that doubleness of life which, sometimes, in one normal moment, makes all the passion and tragedy of the moment before seem not quite real. She felt a wretched disgust with all human nature which could be so outwardly false to itself, which was so false to itself in her as she talked of indifferent things.

It was against Cecily she was bitter. The soft, contemplative eyes, and the almost deprecating forward droop of the head — Madame Carmel had insisted they were to be distrusted. And she had been right.

Under different circumstances, Anne wondered, would she have so much as noticed the silences that came over them while they sat at dinner. Would it have seemed to her that Jean was a little absent, and Cecily somewhat quiet and dreamy? Jean was often absent when he had parish matters on his mind. And it was Cecily's way, frequently, to dream.

But it was afterward that the unmistakably unwonted happened, when her brother went to his own room, turning the key in the lock, and Cecily, pleading the need for rest, went away also.

Anne was left alone. She took her work out to the garden. Yvonne was playing under her shawl house, by the cellar door. Etienne was not with her. She left the dolls and came over to the apple tree, swinging against one of the low boughs, and asking for a story.

Anne gave her one mechanically, out of the store of miscellaneous bits of history she had got from her brother and his books. She knew it by heart and told it without thinking what she said. Yvonne, with a child's quick feeling in such matters, realized the lack of interest and enthusiasm in the teller, and reflected it. She waited to the finish, studying Anne critically and without approval, her round, black eyes fixed, chewing meditatively at the end of one of her braids. She did not ask for more, but, by a method of rolling her body over and using hands and knees, scrambled up and departed back to the shawl house.

Anne hardly noticed that she had gone.

The old lifelong habits of reticence between herself and Jean, their rule of forcing no confidences from each other made her hesitate to ask the direct question which would determine the truth or falsehood of Paul Tetrault's informing. Yet she would do it. Without definite knowledge she would not give herself to that marriage. If it were true, Jean need not know from whence she had it.

There were, as she saw it, three loopholes of escape for her. The first was that everything had been a fiction of Paul's own inventing. But she had no hope of that. Paul lacked the daring and wit to plan in any such complicated wise. And was not the circumstantial evidence of the bit of silver chain, the poppy, and the meeting, little short of unquestionable?

As for the second chance, it was hardly one that she wished for, even to get her own release. It was that Jean should mean to marry Cecily, as he could easily do, so far as mere worldly considerations were concerned. The keeping of the secret would be of no avail, in that case. And he would marry her or renounce her altogether. As to there being for him any middle course, it was not worth the considering. He had said once, in one of his fruitless attempts to show her Harnett with his own eyes, "To care for a woman would mean, for me, to protect her—even from myself." And she knew that it was so. The third chance was that Antoine had heard, and would tell, upon his own account. That, however, was very improbable. The Métis was not talkative, and he was loyal. Nevertheless, he must be seen and silenced.

And precisely at the moment he appeared at the front gate, opened it, and came in.

He took the chair near Anne's and leaned toward her. "I heard," he said.

"I supposed so," said Anne, going on with her knitting. "But you will not repeat it, of course?" It was less a question than an assertion.

"No," said Antoine, "I wont repeat it." And she asked for no further assurance. It was not necessary. He sat considering her quick needles. Then he began again. "You need not marry Paul Tetrault," he said. She turned to him quickly. He was in no

wise disturbed. "You need not," he repeated, "unless you want to." She did not have to ask him how he knew anything of all that. She guessed at once. He had managed in some way to listen.

"I went after him," he continued. "He took the path, the same path, and I followed. When we were by the pond where the lilies are, I made him stop. And you won't have to marry him. I am telling you so now, and before to-night he will come and tell you so, too." It took some diplomacy to bring about even the outline of an explanation. But Anne pieced together, with considerable supply of imagination, that Antoine had blocked Paul's way, putting himself in the path and refusing to move until he had pointed out to the terrified habitant that to open his mouth as to the Curé and the American woman would be to bring upon himself certain and unpleasant death. "If I hear that you have told this thing to any one when I come back next winter, five, ten, twenty, fifty years from now, I will kill you," Antoine had warned, and it appeared that Paul had been greatly agitated. But some one else might tell, he had protested. To which Antoine had made reply that Paul by his own previous statement to Anne had been the only observer. Antoine's finely cut, satanic lips curled in a smile which had nothing in the least reassuring. "I told him that I am a Métis, that I should like to kill some one in a way that would give pain." And his wolf eyes

looked it. "It was the only way," he informed her, with superior wisdom and complete confidence in his own actions and judgment. "It would have done no good to marry him. Afterward—or sometime when he was drunk, he would have told. I know him," and he jerked his head assertively. "But now—he will hold his tongue, because it will be stiff with fear." And he smiled again, with more keen enjoyment than he wanted to show.

Anne suspected that Paul had had a bad time. But Antoine had nothing more to say about it. "You won't marry him?" he asked. She was only too glad to be able to tell him that she would not. He nodded approval and satisfaction, and, turning on his run-down heel, left her.

It was a loophole of escape she had not counted upon. Only, as in certain inquisitorial dungeons, it seemed to her that she had been permitted to find her way out of one, merely to discover herself in another.

She was the child of a country of which it had been said, after the edict of Richelieu, that it contained no heretics, the daughter of the church through unknown numbers of generations. Its teachings had grown into that second nature which so often becomes the more influential of thoughts and of actions which have time for consideration. It was bred in her from remote centuries—the horror of forsworn sacerdotal

vows. The breaking of the decalogue could hardly have appeared so despicable; — the difference in the secular world between a departure from the code of honor and the mere committing of a crime. An apostate priest — the name was opprobrium, an abomination, the thing itself an outcast, a pariah shunned of men. From that it would lie with her, very possibly, to save her brother. If he should determine, if he had already determined, to forsake the priesthood and marry, she would have only to go to him and offer the sacrifice of her own love for that of his. And he would give it, without hesitation, whatever the cost to himself, or even to Cecily. It was not for the mere argument and effect of the words he had held against her, that not the following of inclination but the doing of duty was the thing which one was born into the world destined to have for one's portion, that in the choice between the two lay the issue of life. He would see it as his duty to save her, and he would accept it. She would have only to say to him that she would never see Harnett again if he himself would promise the same as to Cecily Thorne. And if the need came, she must do it.

A quavering and distressed voice close to her inquired, "What is the matter, Ma'amselle?" It was Etienne. He had come around from the other side of the house and had stopped a few feet away. He

was not so young but that he had already seen death, and he had thought that Anne might perhaps be dying. Her eyes were shut, and her face was so white and drawn. When he found that she was not, he began, in his relief, to snivel, and Yvonne, coming up, expressed her opinion of boys who cried, quoting to back it, moreover, that of Monsieur Carmel — a habit she had acquired since her residence in the presbytère, and which lent weight to her views.

Etienne resented it, and there was very nearly the first pitched battle. Anne came in between them and brought about peace, of a sort. Etienne, however, betook himself and his injured dignity away. He would play with boys, and Yvonne called after him that she didn't care and preferred being alone, in any case.

It was the time-old feminine defiance, disproved, as usual, by a prompt loss of interest in things in general, after a very short period of too ostentatious enjoyment. Anne saw the accentuated attempts at having a good time gradually abandoned for a picture book, and finally for dreary meditation. Yet Etienne was playing in front of the church, shouting. His good time was not feigned at all. It was a hard world for women — little and big.

But the commonplace and trivial, so deadly to high emotion, had intervened for Anne. The impulse to tragedy and self-sacrifice was lessening. She began to

come out from the influence of inherited prejudices. A prejudice of any sort was not apt to govern her for long. The elemental was too strong in her. Save in the doctrines of the faith, which she accepted with that docility which has called upon French Canada the praise of popes, she insisted upon reasoning all things from a logical premise.

The influence of the convent school and of her first confessor had both been inadequate to affect her in this. For herself — approved by her brother and discouraged by her father and mother—she had worked it out to her own satisfaction and definitely decided, while she was still almost a child, that pilgrimages to Oka and Ste. Anne, to shrines in general, or reciting prayers in front of tiny bronze St. Peter's could not obtain indulgences; that absolution was, moreover, to be bought, not by confession and penances, but only by that reality of repentance which was so little dwelt upon. None of all this had constituted heresy in itself, but was discountenanced by her parents, by the nuns, and the priests, as a tendency thereto, possibly inherited from a recalcitrant grandfather, and desirable to check. Their combined forces, however, had failed to check it. Jean had given his sanction to her scheme of morality and helped her to it, and Jean was the ultimate court of appeal. For them a sin lay in the uncurbed inclination fully as much as in the act; a wrong which one did not commit only because of the prevention of exterior cir-

cumstances was none the less committed to all intents and purposes, and laid to one's count. As a man thought in his heart, so he was.

And what, therefore, would it avail her brother's salvation that she should coerce him into outward compliance with the law if in his heart he should be longing to break it? The saving of the soul was the affair of the soul's self. There could be no other way. As for the saving of a good name—that was the least of all arguments. In her own case it had not weighed as a feather. Even in her brother's, it did not, enough to determine her course.

What was to be avoided was that failing most abhorrent of all to her,—hypocrisy. A renegade priest was at least less sunk in disgrace and infamy than one who would be mocking the service of God with devout hand and lip, the while rebelling within himself. The deterioration of a finer nature which Jean had feared for her as a fallen woman, she feared for him as a priest held to his work by nothing more than constraint of circumstances, forced into outward acceptance of his lot. There could in no wise be honesty in that. There could be in openly forsworn vows.

In the end she reversed her first decision. If her brother should determine to deny his vows and marry, she would try to prevent it only in so far as one could be justified in seeking to change the course of another's life—by influence. But the pettiness of offering him

her own social salvation in exchange for his, she would not stoop to that.

Cecily Thorne would be leaving in another day. The interval would bring forth results one way or another. It was precisely that she might wait for those, and act accordingly, that she had made Paul Tetrault concede her a week's secrecy as to the renewed promise of marriage—the compelled promise from which she did not at all hesitate to accept Antoine's help at escape.

Thérèse Labiscaye was coming across the street toward the presbytère. Anne laid down her work and went to meet her at the gate.

CHAPTER XXIV

JEAN CARMEL had drawn his one chair out to the middle of his room, and he sat there, his arms folded and his square chin sunk down, looking out to where the pink and white and crimson poppies in the bed beneath Anne's window were blurring with color in the sun.

For the most part moral development goes on unconsciously, gradually, little by little, and unfelt. But in almost every life worthy the name there comes the period when all the influences which have been at work from the beginning, heeded or unrealized, converge and focus in two distinct forces contending against each other, as Jacob and Esau within Rebecca. And even as Esau was a man of nature and Jacob a plain man dwelling in tents, so are the striving elements that of the untrained, simple, primitive creature, the elder, and that of he who inclines to the quiet ways which make for peace and order and the building up of peoples and societies — later born.

Yet of Jacob and Esau it was foretold (symbol of the history of civilization) that the first must serve the

second in the end. And of the individual man it is not predestined. The outcome must be determined in each case—the future mastery. It was the crisis which Jean Carmel was facing.

In his adoption of the priesthood there had been no question of vocation at any time, hardly even of his own volition. Before he had come into the world, his mother had prayed with all the fervency of a zealot's nature that her firstborn might be a son who could be devoted to the service of God in the church, and atone, in the third generation, for the sin of the grandfather who was, even then, in an heretical land, forsaking the faith, and rousing thereby the bitter anger, condemnation, and disapproval of his daughter. The desire had had no effect upon the bent of the child; he had developed no religious zeal. But from the time he could grasp the meaning of the word "future" it had been given him to understand that his own was to be the priesthood. All plans, all arrangements, and all his education had been with that end in view. And he himself had acquiesced, if with no especial enthusiasm, at least, without objection. He had recognized that a man had necessarily an occupation. That of a priest was distinctly a creditable one in itself, presupposing in his country at any rate, a respectable family in good standing. And he had had none of his grandfather's scepticism, had never been exposed to influences which might have caused it.

He had accepted his work in life and, in due time, had been ordained. The vow of celibacy had meant almost nothing to him at the time, had been perhaps the one of all to which he had given least thought. Marriage had never entered into any of his calculations, nor love into his experience. Up to then his outlook upon life and history had been restricted. It was only after he had become a priest, and to an extent his own master, that his eyes had been opened to his surroundings and to much of the story of the past. Then he had had his first doubts of the desirability of that celibate priesthood, finally insisted upon by a master-mind in statecraft, not for the greater glory of God, so much as for the greater power of a hierarchy bound to no family or country owing but one allegiance. If a tree was to be judged by its fruit, the fruit of celibacy had been too often such as the church might well dislike to name. He could not but know it, and knowing it could not but reach his own conclusion—one unaffected then by any personal inclinations.

Even the little maiden of Picardy had not caused him to wish seriously for freedom and much less to contemplate obtaining it. But now he asked himself by what right he or any man dared to renounce beforehand something of which he had no knowledge, to try to determine for himself his own future contrary to the plans of Heaven for the race, to attempt the

forestalling of Destiny and checking the will of his Creator. It was not virtuous; it was impious. The touch of a woman's hand had been the call to every impulse of youth and life and temperament which were strong in him. And he had answered it. Was he not as other men who did their part in the up-building, the perpetuating of peoples?—that duty impressed by Holy Writ to the fostering of the love of nation only less sacred than the love of God, a duty never denied or depreciated until after the Master had returned whence he had come and left half-comprehending disciples and converts to misinterpret too many of his words, twisting them, adapting them, to their own tastes or preconceptions. And had not St. Paul himself—whose asceticism was late born as his faith—been in his younger manhood a member of the Sanhedrin and so the husband of a wife? Had not that which he had written to the Corinthians overreached unjustifiably through misguided zeal any possible deduction to be drawn or wrenched from the guarded, matter-of-fact answer of Christ to the questioning Pharisees?

A man's right to love some one woman and have her for himself before heaven and earth was older than Christianity, older than the church, older than the third century council, which first had proposed the terms of celibacy—as old as creation. It was a right furthered by lawgivers and philosophers of wisdom

from time beyond reckoning. Nature herself, which gave the lesser chance of life to the unmarried, spoke for it unequivocally.

And what though he had, in his ignorance, bound himself with an oath? Was a man to be held by moral law to a pledge of wrong-doing, when even by the law of man he might not be? Such an oath, ought it not properly to be as abhorrent to all normal men as those unnatural ones of Abraham, Agamemnon, or Jephtha, to which it was near akin, after all? Was one bound in honor to adhere to it? Truly, it was written that "if a man vow a vow unto the Lord, he shall not break his bond" — and much more of the sort. Yet, was an evil vow to be counted as made to the Lord? "That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform," one had commanded. Yet a Greater had said, "Swear not at all, because thou canst not make one hair white or black." And that One had come down to the foundation of this as of all things. The fundamental wrong lay in swearing at all. Yet to forswear —! He was no sophist. Did two wrongs make one right?

Anne spoke to him through the locked door. He stood up mechanically and went to open it. Thérèse Labiscaye was asking for him. And it was a rule of the presbytère that none was ever to be denied access to him at any hour of the day or night.

The part of priest did not come easy to him in the

very moment of revolt, of contemplating abjuring it for good and all. Nevertheless, he went out at once.

Thérèse's troubles had been more than usually bitter of late. The mother, for whom she had sacrificed her own life happiness, had been querulous and dissatisfied, the sister contemptuous in her rare letters, which, to make the humiliation greater, had to be taken to strangers for reading, and the work of the little farm patch very hard.

"Look, mon père, if you do not believe that I am tired." She bent awkwardly forward from her chair and stretched out to him two blunted, knuckled hands, cracked and reddened and sore. They shook like an old woman's. She jerked them back suddenly and dropped her face on them, doubling over and huddling down, her forehead upon her knees. She was not crying or sobbing, not making a sound. Jean Carmel sat looking at her as the embodiment of his own future, sent to typify what he would be if he should do as she had done and turn away from the love that offered. He took his chair nearer to hers and laid his hand on her shoulder, bent and thin and angular. Just then he did not attempt to speak to her. After a while she lifted her head and leaned back in the chair, her eyes on the floor, sullen.

"I am only thirty years old," she said resentfully, "and half of my life is still to come — this life."

He felt the impotence of the conventional religious

consolations she would be able to understand. To some ascetic, visionary half-saint they might have brought hope and peace. They were meant for such, conceived by such. But to a dulled woman of hardly more sensibility than some of those beasts of burden like which she toiled, they had no real meaning. He recognized helplessly, as he had done before now, the difficulty of reaching those who are in great suffering of mind and soul, and whose religion is founded on dogma rather than on the spirit of unformulated Christianity.

Religion to Thérèse Labiscaye was the dogma of the church and its symbols, and there is a depth of sheer human wretchedness which such cannot reach. The all-penetrating comfort of the simple faith of the two great commandments of love might have touched her. But that faith was something which circumstances and Monsieur Biret had not prepared her to understand. The Good God Himself was to her the benign and bearded form in man's likeness which she had seen in sacred prints. She was willing to accept the faith that He would reward her with heaven if she were to do well, confess at intervals, and receive the Blessed Sacrament; that He would punish her if she should sin, and forgive her in time, appeased with penances, if she were repentant. Her God had the advantage over the heathen's only in that he inclined to virtue. He was as real, as corporeal, to her as had

been to Marie de l'Incarnation three centuries before, when faith was alive, the Saviour to Whom she addressed unlovely rhapsodies. And He served her usual needs. But He was not the God to comfort the rebellion of dead despair. And Jean Carmel did not invoke Him.

He talked to her, not in his capacity of a priest, but as a man who has himself seen life stretching before him at times as a dreary outlook, yet has kept on his way, found his reward in usefulness, and discovered that, seen closer, from day to day there was much of interest and of good.

She sat at first, without looking at him, twisting the end of a scarf she wore around her neck. Then at length she broke down and cried, and the sullenness and rebellion passed. She stayed a long time, and went away more contented.

He shut himself into his own room again, and, returning to his place on the stiff willow chair in the middle of the floor, his arms on his chest and his chin sunk again, took up the argument with himself where he had left it. Like the story of the arctic traveller who was himself revived and warmed in the effort of reviving a companion, he had been helped in helping Thérèse. He too was less rebellious against existing conditions. It was largely he himself who had made them; he was bound to admit that. He had been a man, and one of anything but facile disposition, when he had been ordained. No one had forced him, reluctant, to it. By his own

act, his own vows, freely taken, he was become, more than the majority of men, an example. As he should do, many others would do. In proportion to his prominence was his responsibility. Far and near, now and in the future, he could in no wise see all the wrongs to which his own breaking of faith with those who believed in him and who trusted him might lead. He knew that, more than many priests, he was looked up to in his parish. And the harm which is done by the loss of confidence in one who has been entirely believed in may well be incalculable. With all but the best and strongest characters the distrust will spread out beyond the one to the many, causing doubt of all mankind, including inevitably, in the end, the Creator of so much imperfection. He would have much to answer for who should betray the trust of even the least of these. The near consequences he could, in a measure, foresee, now. The remote he could never know, but they would be none the less surely his to account for.

There was a duty he owed to the woman beyond question, and it was the one nearest to his heart. Yet it was only one. And the conception of obligation had no right to be narrow. The duty at hand was by no means always the one to be done. It was frequently—short-visioned moralists to the contrary notwithstanding—the one to be passed over for a larger, as the history of nearly all reforms and charities could show. The greatest good of the greatest number was that

upon which the decision of his action could alone be based.

Then he felt in memory the clinging touch of the woman's hand over which his own had closed. He rose sharply and crossed the little bare room. And, coming to a stop by the wall, he caught sight of the woman herself. She was at the farther window of the wing which formed her room, the afternoon light coming in behind her. She was standing, and the hand which rested on the deep masonry sill held a wilted red rose and what seemed to be a dried, pressed spray of some white flower. He recalled the morning in the month of May, when the pastures had rippled in gold and green, when the maples had been fringing out in yellow and russet, when the farmers had been ploughing their fields, and a group of children, hanging over the stone fence, had been watching one of them. He recalled the handful of meadowsweet one of them had shyly offered him, and which he had passed on to Cecily. The duty toward the greatest number, what was that to him? Himself and the woman he loved, those were all his world, and ought rightly to be. He would think of himself and her—the others might fight their souls' battles for themselves.

Then he remembered Anne and the promise he had made her give him, that she would come back to him when she should have no other where to go. Could she and would she come to a house which held his

wife and children — the woman that she would be by then? Would he himself want her to do so?

He stood where he was, thinking it over in all its aspects, looking at it from every side. But all that showed itself to him unmistakably, beyond the shadow of a doubt, was that, if his sister were to come back to him, she must find him alone — as he had taken his vow to be, and must remain. And at least one reason and excuse for, one object of that vow was apparent to him now. In the doing of his duty it left a man with no one to consider save himself.

He went back to his chair once more. It was a long while before he moved. When he did the face that he lifted had aged by years. From the face of a man in the full of youth, which it had been before, it had become that of a man past the best of his life. And there came back to him Anne's words, spoken in the dense forest of the hill crest, in the blackness of the gathering storm, —

“It is your life which is the ruined one — I hope you will never know how ruined.”

The knowledge had come.

CHAPTER XXV

SOME one went by in the street, singing cheerfully and discordantly to the night: —

Chante, rossignol, chante
Toi qui as le cœur gai.
Tu as le cœur à rire
Moi je l'ai-t-à pleurer.

Jean Carmel, sitting at his desk, heard it through the open window, and it was entirely applicable to his own frame of mind, if not — judging from the exuberant shouting — to that of the singer. He had been rereading a letter which had come to him late in the afternoon, and which had given him practically the assurance that his days at St. Hilaire were reaching their end, and that his work would be thenceforth in Montreal. There would have been a time when it would have been good news, untempered by any regrets, beyond a slight one at leaving the parishioners who were attached to him. But now it had come too late. Two years ago it would have saved Anne. And two years ago it would have spared Cecily. As for himself, he did not wish to have been spared. Two years ago this parish, in which he had

done the work of his youth, whose church and presbytère he had built, would not have been endeared to him by the grave of his mother, and yet more by the recollections of a meadow sloping down to the river edge, a field waving with the gold and white of great daisies, the path to the Tetrault farm, the garden where the white lilacs and the daffodils had blossomed when the woman who was to be so much to him had first come into it.

In the city there could be no garden of his own, where he could grow so much as one bed of the fragile single poppies. At least none of those should be left to his successor, whoever that might be. Everything else he might have, to plant and profit by, if he should care to work over them—as the chances were he would not. But the frail flowers of sleep which had come from her, those should be torn up and burned—threadlike roots, brittle stems, and petals of brilliant gauze.

Yet it was not probable that he would have to leave St. Hilaire unless he wished to. And he would not wish to now. It would be better that he should stay on in the presbytère to which he had grown accustomed, with the parishioners who knew and cared for him, becoming old among them and their children's children in the seclusion of the ancient hills. It would be the best place for Anne to find him when she should stand in need of him. He had duly considered it all and speculated upon what his course would have been had things been as they were not.

He would have gone with Anne to the city, where they would have been at once among many friends. Anne would have married. That would have been little short of inevitable. Her beauty and her own temperament assured it. Precisely because her love for this one man was of the character he could not but know it to be, it would not absorb her whole life if she had nothing more actual than memory to feed it upon. Only with the idealist did such passions exist. And Anne was in no sense an idealist. She could be able to, she would be obliged to, love again with almost equal self-abandonment, if conditions should be favorable.

As for himself, he might, in course of time, have hoped to rise considerably above his present rank in the church, and importance in the world. He believed his talents and his friends to be such as to assure that. And he was ambitious at bottom — intensely so. But as matters stood he must perforce put aside ambition. A priest could not advance far who would persist in keeping with him a sister who would be a woman of tarnished name. Such were not the companions of church dignitaries.

To be sure, it would always be possible to provide for her away from himself. But it was not in that manner and spirit he contemplated receiving her back. So far as he was concerned, she should be to him at any time in the future, under any and all conditions, precisely as she was now. And therefore advancement could not

well be for him, unless perhaps in the very unlikely event of Anne's deciding at the last moment to give Harnett up — an occurrence not to be looked for or counted upon, yet one which would have made all and any sacrifice seem to him amply repaid.

He took up a pencil which lay on the desk and began marking straight lines and X's and scrolls on the back of the envelope. Somewhere outside a gray owl hooted several times. He turned in his chair impatiently. By the dim light he could just see the photograph of Cecily upon the mantelpiece, the picture of the woman of another world than this of the forests and fields — of another world than his, and destined to remain so henceforth.

He had told her so that evening as they had stood together in the sorrel and tall seeding grass, in a neglected corner of the yard. They had talked for a long while, until many stars had come out in the vault of night blue, yet a little pale with the daylight which had not quite faded away. He had showed her everything in the past and present exactly as it was, had told her of his mother's forebodings and of the letter which he had written in fulfilment of his promise, the letter which a Fate, bound apparently to have its way, had made useless. She had taken it very quietly and listlessly, he could not help thinking, with something the indifference of one who from the first expects little better of life and so does not rebel. He was not to her all that

she was to him. He recognized that. And he had been right when he had read her as one who would do well enough without the thing she desired, partly because of a latent philosophy inherent in her, partly because she had seen too many sides of life to find any one more important than all the rest.

But for him it had been the black hour of tragedy. The night about him, the present, and the future were dark. They offered him nothing beyond the hope of being yet of some use to Anne and his parishioners. "If the end of duty can ever be really bitter," he remembered that he had once said, when they had been speaking of Thérèse Labiscaye. He was learning now if it could be. Yet it was not the end, after all, only the beginning; and it must be worse before time should make it better.

He blew out the candle and got up, groping his way to the fireplace and taking down the picture he had been looking up to, but could not see now. It was cool and smooth against his aching forehead.

After a few minutes the door from the hallway opened. He heard it, and heard some one coming across the room. In the darkness he could just see the white blur of a dress. It was Cecily. The blood in his temples beat cold. The hands that held the photograph trembled uncontrollably. When she was within only a few feet of him she stopped, hesitating for her next step. He could have stretched out his

arms and touched her. She moved on cautiously. And then he did reach toward her. But she was too far away. It was the symbol of his life that the arms closed upon only the shadows and the air.

He choked back a desperate moan of disappointment. But she had gone on, unconscious even that he was there.

She rapped softly at Anne's door, opened it, was outlined for an instant, diaphanous against the candle-light, then the door closed behind her.

He stood where he was. The beating of his pulses died down. He was glad that she had been the one step too far out of his reach. It was better so. The volume of the story of their two lives together had finished out there in the garden and the twilight. A day more, and it would be closed, clasped shut for good and all.

* * * * *

Anne was kneeling upright by the open window, and the yellow glow of the one candle burning low in the socket fell, on the white of her nightgown. She had only turned her head at first. Then she rose slowly, growing cold to the hands which hung before her, holding the rosary, and to the bare feet on the boards. Cecily stopped irresolute, the forward droop of her head against which Madame Carmel had animadverted as a lure to strong men, a little more marked than ever.

Anne, nevertheless, was afraid of her. She was afraid to see her lips move. And when they did she could not hear the first time. Cecily repeated it. She had something to tell her—should she stay now or come back? She reached out her hand to the latch again. But Anne was one to cut the thread and have done with it rather than wait for the falling of the sword. She checked her. Cecily left the door and glanced over to the little bed where Yvonne lay flat on her back, with her red mouth open roundly, and a stiff tail of hair sticking out upon either side of her neck. Anne saw the glance. Yvonne would not wake, she said; and Cecily crossed to the window and sat on the wide sill. For all the slight hesitation and diffidence of her manner, Anne felt the determination underlying it, the self-possession. And it had its effect upon her. She herself in crucial moments was never self-possessed—however much she might be so of the spirits of resistance, or set decision, or dogged purpose.

They were looking full at each other; and Cecily Thorne needed no telling that Anne was forewarned. Upon the whole it was better that she should have been. It saved explanations which would have been, of necessity, difficult. In the hope of making what little reparation might lie in her power she had obliged herself to overcome a reticence natural and cultivated in her, a reluctance to approaching the subject

of sentiment, unless it were of the most impersonal sort. To deny an enthusiasm or affection, in action and even in word, was her manner of keeping it sacred and intact to herself, as the Oriental keeps hidden from the eyes of all other men, and ignores in speech the woman upon whom he sets most value. And she shrivelled and recoiled from the touch of sympathy. It was not easy for her to do what she meant to. Yet, if Anne Carmel's gratitude could be worked upon by putting plainly in front of her the extent to which her brother was, for her sake, carrying his renunciation of happiness and ambition and hope, there might still be brought some good out of so much evil. Anne was generous, and her generosity might prove the one compulsion which would make her give over Harnett, where all else had failed. At any rate — it had seemed to Cecily worth the chance.

"Has some one told you?" she asked now quietly. "Or have you seen for yourself?" Anne delayed her answer; then she gave it. She had not seen for herself; some one had told her. Had it been Jean, Cecily questioned? The use of the name slapped Anne in the face. She bit her underlip. It had not been — her brother. No. Cecily accepted the rebuke. "I will call him Monsieur Carmel, if you prefer," she said with much unconcern.

Anne had somewhat the quickness of phrase always resulting from habitual speech in the language of

courts. "You must call him," she said, "by whatever name you know that you have the right to use." But it was a courtesy a trifle too elaborate in view of the other's simplicity. It struck false, and she felt it.

If it had not been Monsieur Carmel who had told her, Cecily asked, would she let her know who it was?

Anne thought a moment. There was, perhaps, no real reason why she should not have told, beyond the force of the habit of keeping her own counsel. She shook her head. "No," she said; "but it was some one who passed through the woods, just above the path." Even by the wavering candle-light she could see that Cecily reddened painfully to the eyes.

"I am sorry," she answered, "very sorry; not so much for myself—that is of little importance one way or another—but for your brother. As for me, these people are not mine, and their opinion is of no consequence to me."

It would not go any farther, Anne told her with cold reassurance. It seemed to her rather late to be thinking of Jean. The time to have done that would have been before returning to St. Hilaire; and she suggested as much now.

Cecily showed no resentment. It was not to fall into recriminations that she had forced herself to go through with this distasteful episode. "I realize that," she answered in the low voice, leaning her head back against the masonry. "And I wish now

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“ ‘He has given up love for your sake,’ Cecily finished, ‘and now he intends to forego his ambition and his future.’ ”

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that I had not come back. But whatever else my faults may have been, deliberate intention to do wrong was not one of them." She leaned toward her earnestly. "I want you to believe this much, Anne," she urged, impressing it: "that until to-day I thought in all sincerity that the only woman who was more to your brother than a casual, passing interest was — yourself."

Anne did not answer. Her loose hair was over her shoulders, hanging almost to her knees in waves of shadowy brown. She flung it back with her hands and a throw of the head. Cecily looked away from her to where the trunk and thickly leaved branches of a tree a few feet away showed vague in the dull night. It was raining, a fine drifting mist which made no sound except a regular dripping from the eaves. Presently she looked back at Anne. "You remember Madame Tetrault's loud comment by the church door, before vespers?"

"Yes," answered Anne.

"And you remember that when I was here a year ago you told me a good deal about yourself?"

"Yes," she said again, with a questioning inflection. "It is inevitable that we strangers should hear some of the gossip of the village; you realize that? And it is equally inevitable that I should have pieced together all my scraps of information and report, and, with a very little filling in on my own part, have concluded that you had gone back to your first intention, that you intend again — to leave St. Hilaire?"

"If there had been any reason for telling you, I should have done so myself," Anne said in defensive challenge of any possible imputation of shamed secrecy.

"Yes," Cecily accepted it; "but there was no reason why you should have told me anything whatever. All I want you to see," she said, speaking distinctly, "is this — that your brother himself has told me nothing concerning you which I did not already know, and that not until I showed him I knew did he speak unreservedly." She stopped and sat looking down at the floor, choosing the words. Then she raised her eyes to Anne's deliberately. "And I knew then that I had been right from the first, after all. There is no woman he has ever placed before you — and there is not now. If it had not been for you, I believe that his vows and what he sees as his duties would not have won in the end. If it had not been to keep a home ready for you in the future, he would have given up all the rest for me."

Anne had the way of remaining for long stretches in one position without moving, a habit like that of continued silence which can give a strong negative force of its own and which can make final movement of telling effect. She had not changed from where she had stood at the first upon rising from her knees at the opening of the door. Now she came a sudden step forward. "Then —" she began. Her lips were apart, she was holding her breath, a white figure of painful eagerness and keen anxiety.

"After to-morrow," Cecily answered, "he will never see me again."

For some little space neither of them spoke. Then Cecily followed up the advantage she knew she had gained. "There was a letter which came to him this afternoon," she said. "Have you seen it?"

"No," said Anne, and showed by the look that crossed her face the inevitable jealousy of one from whom the confidence she has always been accustomed to monopolizing has been taken to be given another.

Cecily saw it. And it was by no means annoyance against Jean Carmel she wished to rouse in Anne. "No," she said, considering. "I should suppose not. He is hardly the man to let his sacrifices be known to the one for whom they are made." Anne waited, not questioning, but expectant and clearly impatient. Cecily told her of the contents of the letter. "He has given up love for your sake," she finished the recital "and now he intends to forego his ambition and his future."

She could see Anne shiver. The air that came through the window was damp and cool. It caught up long tendrils of Anne's hair and blew them against Cecily's face. A bird disturbed in the tree outside fluttered and chirped and was still again.

The candle had been guttering down in the stick. It flared up redly and went out. Yvonne sighed and moaned, turning over in her bed.

Cecily rose, and they faced each other in the darkness. Then she felt for the two firm, long hands, lifted them, and pressed the palms against her cheeks.

She dropped them and went noiselessly out of the room.

CHAPTER XXVI

ANNE stopped at the top of a divide she had just climbed. She glanced behind her in the direction of St. Hilaire. It was already eight or nine miles away, and not even the spire of the church was to be seen. She had left there at seven o'clock, telling Amélie that she would be absent all day, which had had the effect of making the good woman exceedingly anxious.

Jean Carmel had not been at the presbytère. On Monday he had gone to one of the other parishes of the diocese, some distance away, taking part in the yearly retreat of priests and profiting by the sermons of an eloquent Franciscan. It was Saturday now. The exercises would be over in the morning, and by night he would be at home again. More than a week had passed since he and she had stood together in the street, watching three people going away along the road, — Cecily and the two Thornes.

Just as Cecily had come to the bend, which would take them out of sight, she had dropped behind a few steps and had looked back. Then she had rejoined the others, and Jean Carmel had seen her for the last time. Yvonne had been watching, too. He had

caught her, flung her upon his shoulder, and, turning his face until it had been hidden against the soft, childish body, he had gone into the house quickly. But Anne had seen the face.

* * * * *

It had decided her. And now she was carrying out the decision.

St. Hilaire was well behind her, and Les Trembles not three miles ahead. A mountain hawk was circling widely in the blue of the sky and seemed to be directly above it. She could see the white houses and the church and even the straight lines of the Lombardy poplars which had been planted in long, even rows by some seigneur and his censitaires in memory of France. The sun went behind a high cloud, then shone out again, bringing forth a rainbow—that token of the covenant between heaven and earth which the savages of these woods and mountains had once named strings of the sun. It touched the wheat in a far-off field to a broad band of chrome yellow and the oats to frosted, rippling green.

Anne went aside from the road a little way and sat herself on a big slate boulder. A wild rosebush, pink with bloom, was growing close to her. Without in the least knowing that she did it, she reached out, carefully broke off a rose with no stem, and pulled the petals from it, letting them drift down to the ground. She did it with another and another.

Over at Les Trembles Harnett would be waiting. She had written him to meet her, not in the village, where she was known, but outside, among the ruins of an old seignorial grist-mill. She had not wished him to come to St. Hilaire again. Her movements about there were often spied upon by some of the villagers. Several times when she had gone walking alone, she had found that some child had stealthily followed her—set on, doubtless, by his elders—and was peering from over a rock or from behind a bush.

The rose petals were being scattered over the grass. She saw them for the first time and stopped the purposeless destruction. But she still sat where she was, thinking desultorily.

Other lovers had met in the old moulin banal. Once a man had killed his sweetheart there. It had happened since Anne had come to St. Hilaire. He had believed the girl faithless—mistakenly—and had taken up one of the stones which had fallen from the crumbling walls, beating her on the head with it. Anne imagined how it had been—the first blow, the clinging to the uplifted arm, then to the knees, the falling to lie limp and stunned at the man's feet. It would not be so bad a death, better than many, it seemed to her, and much better than what was before herself.

She looked over to the top of another hill she had left behind. By the roadside was a big black cross

of wood. It stood out against the sky, marking the parish boundary. The sun was striking the glass of the niche beneath it, which glittered with the reflection. She remembered how one of the heartsick and weary early fathers had said that to the eye of the flesh there seemed to be in New France only *des bois et des croix*. The woods—those had been always here, since the Laurentine hills had risen and formed the oldest of ridges. But the crosses—the first had been that one thirty feet high and bearing the arms of France, planted by Cartier at Gaspé, forerunner of the thousands to come. Even far up the Saguenay, where no priest had been before him, a missionary had found a rude cross. A little band of starving Indians, to whom Christianity conveyed only suggestions of necromancy and flesh-pots, had raised it, hoping it would bring game, very probably.

And on the Isle of Demons had been crosses, too, there, where the evil spirits had shrieked through the woods, and haunted Marguerite de Roberval as she had watched die the lover who had been thrown to perish with her for their sin, the child born to them, and the woman who had been her own nurse in far-off Picardy. She had buried them all three with her own hands—the hands which had worked at broideries and tapestries in the halls of the castle of Vimen, yet had fired the arquebuse in the boar and stag hunts of France, as well, in merciful preparation, it seemed,

for that which Fate had in store for her. She had made three crosses and had put them at the heads of the graves. But she had been rescued at last after three years by passing sailors, a creature clad in beast skins and half-savage from loneliness, grief, terrors, and suffering. She had been carried back to Picardy and had died there, herself, long afterwards. Had she never wished she might live again through those three years, hideous as they had been, or that she, too, had died of cold and hunger in the fastnesses of the far North, where lay the man she had too much loved and their child?

Anne considered absently the pink petals upon the grass. Then she brushed some from her skirt, stood up slowly, and kept on her way.

As she came near to the mill she went off from the road, in among the trees. People might be coming in and out of the village, and she did not want to be seen. Harnett was waiting in among the ruins. She could see him while she herself was still hidden by the undergrowth. He was just within the crumbling doorway, standing, leaning against it, watching the road. She stopped under a tree, holding to a branch with raised arm, putting off the step which would bring her into sight. She knew now that she ought not to have come. All the moral strength she had brought to her help was going from her. It did not need even his voice or his touch; only to see him was enough to bring her down again weakly under his

power, the power which made her take wrong for right — worse than that, knowing wrong for what it was, accept it with defiance.

She would go back, and she started to, making a few resolute steps by the way she had come. But she turned her head, and saw him again, standing there in the broken doorway, looking up the road with keensighted, hard, blue eyes.

She was out of the underbrush, and among the piles of loose stones and fallen wall, before he knew that she was anywhere near. Then he heard one of the stones slip, rattling, and he faced about quickly. She was in the shadow of a corner, by a big oak that grew out over where the roof had once been, long since. He went to her, and took her into his arms. She put her own about his neck.

The dark leaves of the oak were not moving. No flicker of sunshine fell down through them, no bird stirred in the branches. There was not a sound.

Anne took away the hand that was half buried in the coil of hair at her neck, pressed it against her lips for a long moment; then drew off from him, going back a few steps to the wall.

Harnett was not imaginative, not sensitive to the influence of the unspoken word, but he felt an indefinite oppressing dread, the uneasiness of one who is facing a higher moral force — some intangible and resented control. He went toward her again, impulsively. She put

out her hand to stop him, holding him away. "Not again," she begged, "it only makes it harder for us both." Her voice was dull and broken.

He had taken the outstretched hand, and he kept it in his. He was thwarted, and his brows came together, frowning with annoyance and fear. "Makes what harder for us?" he asked. "What do you mean?" She dropped her head, and looked away from him. He repeated it. "Makes what harder, Anne? Answer me." She did her best to get the hand away, but he would not let it go, and she was forced to look up into his face. It was close to hers, bending down. She gathered the courage that was going from her, and answered.

He let the hand go, instantly. The minutes passed and neither of them spoke. It was he who did, at last, and the only trace of feeling in his face or tone was that they were too unmoved.

"You only came to say good-by?" he repeated it. "Do you mean it to be final?" She bowed her head. He took her by the wrist so that she twisted in the grasp.

"Tell me why," he commanded.

"Because—" she tried to free herself, "because I must."

He saw that he was hurting her, and loosed his hold a little. "Tell me why," he insisted relentlessly. "That is no reason."

And it appeared to him still no reason when she

had tried to show it to him. Even to herself it was not, put into words, so good a one as it had seemed before. And the explanation was halting, and incomplete, giving, she could not but know it herself, the effect of double purpose, because she would say nothing of Cecily Thorne even by suggestion. That was Jean's own most personal affair, had come near to being his shame. And rather than speak of it, she would have met the death which the habitant girl had met here in the ruins. It would have been easier than meeting Harnett's look of angry suspicion and unbelief. At the best—as he was able to see it from what little she would tell him—she had been played upon with a priest's truly admiration-compelling cleverness and understanding of character. Argument, entreaty, and remonstrance having failed, Jean Carmel had had recourse to that of which he could be sure, Anne's affection, and, yet more, her gratitude, to say nothing of her somewhat emotionally generous nature. It was justifiable enough, undoubtedly. That much Harnett conceded.

"I should have done it myself," he told Anne. "I should have worked on you by any method that would have gained my ends. For the matter of that, persuasion failing, I should have used force, had you been my sister." It had already struck him more than once as extraordinary that the big priest, who had denied himself food with a strength of purpose border-

ing upon heroism, and had swum the river with great strokes,—showing thereby power of will and body beyond the common,—should not have constrained Anne to do his wish. “Nevertheless,” he added, “you can hardly expect me to rise to any such sublime heights of disinterestedness as to be pleased with your putting his happiness before my own.” And he refused to admit it to her as anything more than just that. “Rather than let your brother forego a possible bishopric in the distant future, or sacrifice himself entirely unnecessarily to keep you a home which you would never have needed, you will let *me* forego the one happiness the world has to offer me, and sacrifice *me* without the least qualm.” She looked at him with a misery which might have stopped him. But he went on unpityingly. “As for the other vague, mystery-wrapped act of self-abnegation, you must own that, as I cannot be told of it, it can hardly move me very much.”

“I would tell you, if I could,” she said.

He shrugged his shoulders incredulously. “No,” he reiterated it, “he calculated skilfully on his knowledge of you, and worked on you in the surest way he could have chosen, through your sense of gratitude.”

She denied it earnestly. Her brother had not worked upon her—only, at any rate, in so far as to get her promise to come back to him if she should ever need a home.

Of the sacrifices he had meant to make upon her account he himself had never spoken, and did not so much as know that she had learned of them. She was ready to defend Jean, but it was a new experience for her to protest her own truthfulness to any one. Heretofore those who had not been willing to take her word, at once and without question, she had ignored with complete indifference. Yet she was begging Harnett to believe her, without the details and explanations which she might not give. "I have told you all that I have the right to, more perhaps," she urged, "and it is true, indeed it is. So far as Jean knows, I have simply thought better of it, changed my mind." Harnett assented promptly, taking up the phrase. That, it appeared to him, was exactly what she had done — found, when it came to the crisis, that she loved him less than she had for a while supposed, and persuaded herself easily, as a consequence, that her duty and her inclination lay together.

"You are sincere, of course," he granted her, "but you could never have done this if you had really cared for me." And there occurred to neither of them the fine unconscious humor of it that the reproach should come from him.

He went over to a heap of débris and sat upon it, reaching down to pick up the heavy walking stick he had dropped at sight of her. He turned over a stone with the end of it, a sharp-pointed, small stone, upon

which a man's hand could have closed. Anne wondered if it might, by any chance, be the same one the habitant had used, and she felt a weary envy of the girl who had been given unconsciousness.

"I am to trust you implicitly," Harnett was saying. "I am to accept your word for everything, whether I can understand it or not. But I may by no means have such trust from you. You take it for granted that I will tire of you and send you adrift sooner or later. You are so prepared for it that you even plan with your brother for your home when it shall have happened." He laughed angrily. "It is probably what you have every reason to think of me — but it is hardly flattering. And it hardly argues the blind faith of a really genuine love." "You expect rather too much of a man," he kept on after a pause, "why should I believe you?"

"Do you think," she asked him, "that this is all so easy for me that I am doing it for my pleasure? Do you think I would do it if I did not feel that I ought to — that I must? Surely," she pleaded, "surely, dear, you might have some little mercy on me, some little pity for me." He struck the stone so sharply that she winced. Then he controlled himself and twirled the stick in the air with exact attention to its balance.

"It looks to me," he said, "uncommonly like a case of cooled ardor. Either you have found that I am not

worth to you so much as your respectability. in which, of course, you would be quite right, though a good deal smaller sort of woman than I thought you; or else, or else I have been supplanted."

With a deliberation entirely equal to his own now, she backed off to the wall and pressed the palms of her hands against it. They worked, rubbing over the old masonry; and the muscles of all her strong, lithe body were moving as those of a brute move while it crouches and gathers rage. There were dull lights behind her eyes, and her lips were tightening across her teeth. "Perhaps," kept on Harnett, "perhaps the American artist is more fortunate than I. I can only offer you my love. But possibly his name also is his to dispose of. And a woman sets a very just value on the name."

It brought no answer. She was an uncomfortable creature, this woman who—he knew it—would have endured anything now before she would have stooped to defending herself. And he had not believed his own taunts, any of them. He had made them in the blind instinct of hurting again because he himself was being hurt. He got up from his pile of stones and walked over to the door, looked aimlessly out to the road, up and down it. Then he came back and stood in front of her, holding tightly to the stick with both hands.

"Never mind all that, Anne," he said, with frank

contrition. "I don't mean it, or believe it. I have done you wrong enough already, heaven knows, without adding that to it. I trust you in the bottom of my heart, absolutely. And I always shall whatever happens, whatever you do." The anger went instantly, and the tears came to her eyes. He walked away, then returned. "Whatever your reasons are," he told her, "I accept them — without any question. And if you had none but that you ought not to come to me, you would be altogether right; I am not fit — and never have been — to get you or your affection."

She threw out both hands with a cry of denial. It was more than he could stand, — so near to her and resist. He had held to the stick that he might not give away to his desire to take her in his arms again, but he flung it off and it struck ringing against the wall. "Anne," he begged her, "Anne, my darling, don't send me away without you. Don't."

* * * * *

The shadow of the oak on the rough gray wall had changed perceptibly. It fell now to the east.

Harnett stood with Anne's hands in his own. "Then if it must be good-by, if it is really to be — let me say it like some sort of a man."

He tried to smile down into her wan, colorless face, but it was not a success, and she had no smile to answer. He lifted the lifeless fingers and kissed them. "Good-by, dear," he said.

She turned away and walked out through the breach in the side of the mill, by which she had come. He looked after her as she went among the trees.

When she had come again to the top of the hill from which she had looked back toward St. Hilaire, and down on the nearer town, she found the hidden nook among the wild rose bushes once more, and she crouched down on the slate boulder, folded her arms on her knees, and dropped her forehead upon them. It was early afternoon then. It was early evening when she raised her head again. She stood up stiffly and looked around. But she did not see anything—neither the stony pastures and full fields toward the village, nor the little creek of Les Trembles which flowed below, going in the direction of St. Hilaire, a thin glistening streak—nor the soft dark tree-tops against the shimmering sky, and the valley lying purple below. She did not see Harnett where he had moved behind a low-growing young spruce a dozen yards away.

The midday had been clear and fair. Now a dreary wind was tossing the branches above her forebodingly. She had promised Amélie that she would be back by nightfall. That would be impossible, as it was. She went quickly out to the road, and on toward St. Hilaire.

Harnett came out from behind the spruce, and, keeping among the trees and bushes, followed her at

a distance. She reached the top of the next hill, where the big parish boundary cross stood, with its figures of the Virgin and Child in a little glass case, hung around with votive trinkets. She stopped. No one was in sight, forward or backward, along the road, nor yet on the great sweep of stone-blue hills. She knelt in front of the cross, pressing her face against it, and finding the satisfaction of a sentient nature in the mere beauty of the sonorous, time-enriched words, she repeated with no great thought of their meaning, choosing the Latin rather than the vulgar tongue for the solace of the sound—"Kyrie, eleison. Christe, eleison. Pater de Cœlis Deus, miserere nobis. Virgo clemens, Refugium peccatorum, Consolatrix afflictorum, ora pro nobis."

Harnett waited with his head uncovered.

When Anne rose up at last, he saw her open the front of the niche, take something from off her own neck, and put it around that of the little painted image of the Mother. She waited still, looking back at Les Trembles, before she should pass the boundary of the parish and lose sight of it. The little white houses and the silvery Lombard poplars were still visible. Sombre gray storm-clouds had banked up upon the horizon and spread out into a hot flush from the sunset over half the sky — a fiery mist.

But above St. Hilaire the darkness of a threatening evening was settling down.

Anne went on.

When she was down at the foot of the hill, and would not have been able to see him even if she had turned, Harnett went near to the cross and looked at the gaudy little figure, with its trashy votive offerings, brass finger rings, miniature wooden arms and legs and hands, glass jewellery, a battered, cheap watch — an old pipe, even. But there was a tiny gold chain about the Madonna's neck, hanging to the bottom of her heavy plaster draperies. He looked at it closely. It was the chain he had given Anne, bought in Quebec, and sent to her the first time he had gone away. There had been a locket on it, which had held his picture. That was not here. She had taken it off.

He kept her always just in sight. The loneliness of these roads among the hills might have had dangers for a woman at any hour, but the more so, it seemed to him, toward dusk. As it grew darker he went nearer, and when night had quite settled down, he was so close that he fancied she must surely hear his footsteps, since he had been obliged to come out upon the road now, too.

The fireflies glimmered back and forth, lighting and darting and disappearing. A will-o'-the-wisp made its weird light among the trees, now here, and instantly far off.

Anne did not go up through the village street. A couple of lanterns which visiting neighbors had hung against the walls, beside doorways, might have showed

her, or a dog might have brought some one out to see who was passing. She took a back path instead, one which would bring her out behind her own house.

There was a lamp burning in the presbytère. The curtain was not drawn, and the light shone out of the window, across the bed of red poppies—a great pool of blood-color in the night.

Anne pushed the rear gate and went through.

It was by that way she had come, Harnett remembered, on the evening when he had first spoken to her—a tall gray apparition, with a crimson stain of bunchberries upon her breast.

The gate creaked as it had turned on its hinges. In a moment the side door of the presbytère opened. Jean Carmel came out upon the steps, and stood against the oblong of light. He peered about.

Anne stopped in front of him. They spoke together for a moment. Then it seemed that Anne was swaying forward. Jean Carmel lifted her in his arms and carried her into the house. The door was shut behind them, and there was only the glow through the window upon the leaves of the apple tree, and across the bed of great, deep red poppies.

Harnett turned away, going back down the path and out of the town.

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